Storm House

KATHLEEN NORRIS

February 2007 Also
Sallie Smith Aug. 2018
Montevalle Corralitos

My sweet sister
Marilyn sent me this
book; said she found
it in an antique store!
She knows I love
Kathleen Norris (locale).

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STORM HOUSE

BOOKS BY
KATHLEEN NORRIS

BARBERRY BUSH
BEAUTY AND THE BEAST
THE BELOVED WOMAN
THE BLACK FLEMINGS
BUTTERFLY
THE CALLAHANS AND THE MURPHYS
CERTAIN PEOPLE OF IMPORTANCE
THE FOOLISH VIRGIN
HARRIET AND THE PIPER
HILDEGARDE
LITTLE SHIPS
LUCRETIA LOMBARD
MY BEST GIRL
RED SILENCE
ROSE OF THE WORLD
THE SEA GULL
STORM HOUSE

STORM HOUSE

By KATHLEEN NORRIS

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To Chauncey Wetmore Wells—with Books

Here they are, my hundred men and women,
Susan, Rachel, Martie, all the others,
Agonizing through their problems human,
Wives and daughters, sisters, sweethearts, mothers
—— I take all the blame. But is it duly?
No, —— it gives me secret satisfaction,
To put some on you, who were so truly
An accessory before the action!

STORM HOUSE

CHAPTER I

AFTER a while Jane went into little Carol's room, next her own, and slipped the thread loops over the crocheted buttons on Carol's linen smock. Mrs. Delafield, the child's mother, made all her dresses; they were beautiful and smart, and decorated with smocking and cross stitch and sometimes designs appliquéd in buttonhole stitches.

Carol loved this particular dress, as a four-year-old will love a garment that is growing too small. It had been tomato-coloured once, but even Madame Ferran's exquisite laundering had faded it a little to a dull rich pink; it was especially becoming to Carol's dark hair, the bloomers were snug on her round little legs.

Jane brushed the small girl's hair sombrely, staring into space, and Carol knew that something was wrong and did not chatter and jump as she usually did, but, twisting her head, looked curiously, sympathetically, into Jane's face.

They went downstairs hand in hand, through the wide lower hallway, through the pantry, big and old-fashioned and smelling of scoured wood and apples and stored cake, and down the painted wooden steps outside of the side entry.

There was a path there, red with powdered brick, and leading through enormous massed shrubs, laurels and pampas grass and laurustinus. Carol and Jane followed it, and went around the boles of tremendous oak trees, and down a slope between rose trees, and through a

gate in a long whitewashed wooden wall that ended, on the right, in stable lanes and the walls of barns and sheds.

Outside the gate there was a small enclosure, fenced on three sides and on the fourth opened, through a narrow gorge whose steep sides were dotted with scrubby bull pines and small crouching oaks, upon the sea. The Pacific was breaking idly in short rough waves upon a noisy scrap of dark shingle, dragging little shells to and fro, marking the blackish sand with a line of froth and seaweeds and broken, hairy cocoanut shells. The horizon line closed the picture, far away, faint, level gray under a light film of afternoon fog.

Close to the gate on the cliff there was a level space carpeted in crushed dead yellow grass, where periwinkle and sea shrubs flourished coarsely. One or two large pines shaded it, and mingled their dry needles with the dry grasses, an enormous fig tree protected it on the north side, and from above the fence a towering eucalyptus dropped pale golden sickles and scented the air with exquisite balm. Upon the terrace there were a few shabby basket and steamer chairs, a bench, and a plain wooden table, low and unpainted, set, this afternoon, with red and black Japanese teacups and a teapot, and a kettle with a spirit lamp.

There were two persons on the terrace. A man in a corduroy jacket and golf trousers, with a tumbled head of fair hair, and a woman who was stretched in a steamer chair with a light homespun shawl spread over her knees.

The man, staring wearily out to sea, did not turn as Jane and the child came through the gate, but the woman looked at her pleasantly, smilingly.

"Oh, how nice you have made our ladybird look!" she said.

Jerry Delafield turned abruptly and glanced at the girl with a nervous sort of uneasiness.

"I am sorry if I hurt your feelings, Jane," he said, annoyed and anxious. "I had no idea that you thought I was criticizing *you!* And now, Elsie," he added to the other woman patiently, with the relieved air of a child who has done his duty, "might I have some tea? Can't we all have tea? It was just a misunderstanding."

For some reason his wife, Elsie Delafield, laughed mysteriously.

"Yes, do give us all some tea, Jane," she said, in her sweet, comforting voice. "Thank you for coming down, dear," she added, in an undertone, to Jane.

Jane seated herself at once, her hands trembling as they touched the cups and spoons, her heart still raging with resentment. Clear tea for Mrs. Delafield, cream and sugar for the man, and only hot water and sugar and cream for Carol. Jerome passed the sandwiches to his wife, and then took a savage bite that almost finished his own.

"Glorious afternoon—not a bit of wind!" Mrs. Delafield said amiably, inconsequently. No one else spoke, and after a pause she said lightly, reproachfully, "No tea, Jane?"

"No, thank you," Jane said evenly, levelly, yet with visible effort. And after a second in which Jerome had continued to gulp sandwiches and glower at the sea, and Elsie had flushed uncomfortably, Jane went on, in a burst, "I only want to say, Mr. Delafield, that Hong took that telegram himself into the kitchen, and he said that Boss would want some ice water after a while——"

"He explained it—he explained it," Jerome said pacifically in a mild, patient voice. He did not look at her. "It was entirely Hong's fault—Fah said so when he brought the tea out," Jerome went on, as Jane fell

sullenly silent. "I'm sorry—I said I was sorry!" he added, in the tone of one only anxious to escape from the subject; "what more can I say?"

Jane did not speak, but she began to pour herself some tea. Her sober little face was intent upon her task, her eyes upon her small sturdy hands. She was a small girl, who looked like a boy, with well-brushed curly short hair, thick eyebrows, thick lashes, little ambushes of brown hair creeping down upon her brown boyish neck at the back and intruding upon temples and ears, and a quite visible down upon hands and upper lip and even upon her smooth cheek, when the light glanced across it. She wore a dark blue cotton, short and plain, with an embroidered collar and cuffs, and might have been Carol's older sister rather than her governess, nurse, and companion. Red colour still burned in her cheeks.

"What more can I say?" asked Jerome again.

Instead of Jane, his wife answered, gently:

"Nothing more, dear. But another time you might find out who was responsible before getting so violent."

"I wasn't violent," the man protested. Already placated and refreshed and soothed by his tea, he ventured a side glance at Jane. "Jane doesn't think I was violent——" he began, with a rising inflection and a half laugh.

Jane hated herself for half smiling in answer. If it had been only Jerome Delafield, she would indeed have resisted the temptation to make friends. But she knew what peace meant to Elsie Delafield, whose whole life was bounded by this old house in an overgrown garden, this terrace, and this strip of sea framed in steep canyon walls.

Besides, a job in a writer's family was more than a mere job. She was proud of being here, she found it

thrilling. Grandma would be disappointed to have this marvellous opportunity lost, and seventy-five dollars a month was generous pay. One had to face these humiliations when one was out in the world—standing on one's own feet.

So she allowed a reluctant expression of forgiveness to lift the corners of her mouth, and raised her eyes fully to Jerome's half-teasing, half-repentant glance. It was all very well for his wife to spoil him. But he needn't think every other woman in the world would, even if he *was* successful in his old writing!

"Listen, Jane," he said. "I shut myself up in my cabin this morning, and stewed myself into a nervous fever. My work to-day, for some reason, all went wrong."

The girl listened with an air of softening. She had heard all this before, heard from Elsie Delafield a hundred times about the moods and vagaries of the writer, but even now, in the deeps of her stubborn heart, it did not seem sufficient excuse for this constant dramatizing of the situation. However, a sudden sensible determination not to jeopardize her position, not to be pettish and spoiled just because Jerome Delafield's wife was determined to make him so, came to her aid. She brightened, and the conversation took its usual late-afternoon tone, desultory, domestic, idle.

Presently Jerome, as always after tea, invited his small daughter to walk down to the shore, and Carol trotted gallantly away beside him, calling back over the pink starched shoulder exultant farewells to her mother. The two women sat on, filling their cups, watching the autumn sunset tinge the sea, watching the west grow red.

"Poor Jerome, half a dozen things have upset him to-day!" Elsie Delafield said, with her fond, excusing laughter.

"I suppose characters can be as contrary as real persons," Jane offered, more because she knew Elsie thought this than because she herself believed it.

Elsie smiled mysteriously; she was in all the writer's secrets. She had created his art almost as wholly as she had made the delicate little body of his daughter. She put her fair head back against the pillow on her chair and closed her long, strange gray eyes.

"He is like a child," she said musingly.

Jane Cassell had a healthy, youthful intolerance with the sacred atmosphere that had been built about the genius of Jerome Delafield. The writer himself, even though he was sometimes unreasonable and impatient, was strangely unaffected by his success, very simple, amazingly reticent about his experiences as an author.

But Elsie, invalided, and ten years his senior, turned every tiny morsel of it under her tongue. It was Elsie who collected clippings and quoted reviews, Elsie who told callers of his idiosyncrasies, Elsie who carefully cultivated any little sign of developing peculiarity or whimsicality on his part. Elsie's hovering pride and devotion invented for him the whole tradition of the genius—erratic, unique, above and outside the laws that govern ordinary mortals.

Jane had been a member of the establishment only a few months: it was because of the genuine admiration she already felt for Jerome and his work that she resented Elsie's attitude with all her soul, felt it an injustice to the man.

"He's doing a rather quick-tempered, irascible old man now, and that's why we're treated to these little tantrums!" Elsie said proudly. Jane, lying back in her chair, her stubby, boyish hands locked behind her head, did not answer.

"What a tall, gawky, sickly, bewildered boy he was

when he first came into this place!" Elsie said presently, as if she were merely thinking aloud. "It was spring—the spring after the armistice, and Storm House looked so beautiful. Lilacs—and mock orange—and the great magnolias covered with blossoms."

She laughed, a soft, faint essence of laughter.

"I was lying out here on the terrace," she said, revelling in memories. "I had been desperately ill. My father and mother were long dead—I was the last—and I was thinking of death, and thinking that I wouldn't mind it. . . . I've never had most people's horror of death," Elsie digressed to remind her companion. Jane, who had been over this ground many times before, made some suitable response.

"Jerry hadn't been gassed, and he hadn't been wounded," Elsie resumed, in her smooth, cultivated voice. "But the war had almost killed him just the same. I don't know all that he's seen, all that he's experienced; he's never been able to tell me everything—he won't talk of the war.

"But whatever it was, it had broken my poor boy's heart! He didn't want to see any more officers, any more trains, any more cities or newspapers or books about profiteering or newspaper articles about preparedness. He wanted to run away from it all before he went mad, and his grandmother—who was my mother's old friend in Baltimore—sent him off for a long sea trip, and told him to come down here to Los Antonios, before he left San Francisco, and see me—a poor, invalid old maid living in an old-fashioned garden!"

She opened her long eyes, stirred the regal blonde head that was beginning at forty-five to be streaked with gray.

"And this is as far as he has got on his Oriental trip!" she added in quiet triumph. Her tone and her laughter

were subdued; she was not trying to impress insignificant Jane Cassell, she was talking to herself.

"That was more than five years ago," she resumed. "Well, I think his crippled old maid friend was good for him, somehow. I didn't treat him like a major of artillery, I didn't ask him about the war. No, I just led him down to my beach, and let him sit there, with the waves talking to him, and the salty air blowing over him."

"Exactly," Jane commented as always at this point, politely, "what he needed."

"Exactly what he needed. He idled here—hearing nothing of what went on in the world, seeing nothing of the after-war horrors. He read old books to me, *The Way of All Flesh* and Macaulay. I didn't hurry him, I didn't question him—he was just a sick child.

"Gradually, the utter peace of it got him. He questioned me about a pepper tree, about some Spanish word I used—he wanted to know how I happened to speak such good Spanish. He got to talking to the Chinese boys—he even laughed at them.

"And then one day he confessed to me that he hated the idea of going off on a ship—hated the thought of making acquaintances on board, and of having to be polite to them."

Elsie turned in her chair, illustrated her story with an extended hand, a white, fine hand with long fingers.

"I just held my hand out to him," she said sweetly, briefly eloquent. "I said to him, 'Jerry, I'm just a lonely sick person myself. But—why go?'"

Jane had heard this part of the story before, too; it was always told in just these words. She smiled sympathetically.

"In those days," Elsie added, "I could walk just a little. We spent our honeymoon right here at Storm

House, and I led the new lord of the manor all over his domain, showed him the barns and the meadows, and told him that he was master of it all, and of my fortune —and of me!"

It was the one drama, satisfying and flattering and romantic, that her starved forty-five years had brought her; she could not but dwell on it. Jane, looking at her, lean, sickly, helpless, and graying in the deepening twilight, felt an impulse of pity.

She rarely felt anything so warm toward Elsie. Her employer was an admirable woman, and a superior one, but despite Elsie's obvious afflictions there was a certain bland superiority about the older woman, a certain air of being in all things adequate and right, a tendency to quote herself, describe her actions, with such tender emotion as brought tears to her own eyes; in short, there was a sort of conscious saintliness about Elsie Delafield that made it impossible to help her, to advise her, to take her at a disadvantage on any score whatsoever. It was Jane who was made to feel herself always at a slight disadvantage, and Jane, being quite shrewd enough to appreciate this, could hardly love the cause of it.

Jane could, however, keep her mouth shut and her manner equable, and Elsie, being met more than halfway by this blunt, boyish, pleasant girl who so beautifully fitted into their need at Storm House, liked her thoroughly. Elsie, Jane said to herself, really was a remarkable woman to have brought this happy and harmonious marriage out of such unmanageable elements as her own age and ill health and Jerome's despair and bewilderment, and she loved to have a listener when she talked about it. Jane had already reached the point when she could wander off into the maze of her own thoughts while Elsie relived the marvellous five years,

merely nodding or commenting automatically in the pauses.

Carol's birth had of course been the climax to Elsie's cleverness. Every doctor who had been consulted—and especially dear Dr. Jim Graham, here in Los Antonios, who was Elsie's family physician—had declared that Carol simply couldn't arrive safely in this world. And Elsie had laughed at them, and had brought forth a beautiful little girl, frail, premature, but undeniably "a baby."

This evening began just like all their evenings. Elsie presently fell silent, with a little sigh of sheer felicity, and Jane, beginning to gather wraps and pillows, said dutifully, "Really, it's a romance!"

And Elsie said, as usual, "I tell Jerry some day he must write it."

By this time Jerome and Carol had come up through the garden, with their shoes tipped with damp from sand and waves and alarming tales of starfish and squid to tell. Jerome always gave his wife his arm, Carol danced ahead of Father and Mother, Jane followed them, with rugs and pillows, and Too Fah, Hong's nephew, followed her in turn, with the tray and the cold teapot.

Elsie's rooms were on the ground floor of the old-fashioned house, to save her stairs: Jerome and Jane usually fussed about her there for a few minutes, lighting lamp or fire, finding her books and glasses, heaping her pillows. Then Jane captured Carol and took her upstairs for bath and supper, and Jerome went to his own rooms upstairs, tore off his outer clothing, and flung himself down for at least an hour's sleep.

The programme never varied. It would now be after five o'clock. Hong would be busy kitchenward with delicious-smelling things and Fah would be padding about the big, sea-scented rooms, drawing shades and

lighting lights. Jerome would snore exhaustedly, face down on his bed; Elsie might doze over her cards, or her correspondence, or lie idle, contentedly watching the fire and listening to the sea down at the bottom of the garden in the dark turning stones on the strand and crashing on the rocks; and Carol would splash and shout ecstatically in her bath. Like all small children and kittens and puppies, she appeared to receive a sudden vitality with the falling of the dusk, and Jane, enveloped in a big towel apron, laughed at her and with her approvingly.

At seven Carol, dewy and powdered and finished with her tray of soup, rusk, milk and apple sauce, pattering in slippers and pajamas and wrapper to her father's door, went in noiselessly to wake him "gentally." This she did by sitting against the pillow on which his head rested and patting his face with her rose-petal hands. Jane, straightening and ordering the nursery adjoining, would hear his sleepy roar of protest fade into endearments to the child.

"Ah, you darling—you darling! My little ladybird—is it time for me to wake up? Kiss me, baby. Did you have your bath? Was it fun? Tell me what you had—more spinach? Animal crackers to-night?"

Presently Carol would come hopping back, and then it was time for Jane to jump her into bed and complete her own simple preparations for dinner, washing the blunt boyish hands and the browned face vigorously, running a wet comb through the brown hair, perhaps changing from a cotton gown to one of linen or voile. Jane had few clothes, but Storm House was extremely informal—one more argument for her present position in her eyes.

Elsie always came slowly in to dinner, her grizzled hair neat, her silk wrapper firmly belted, and afterward,

if Jerome was not working, the three went for a little while into Elsie's room. At first Jane had remained there but a few minutes after the evening meal. Now she knew that there were times when husband and wife really liked to have her. Elsie always needed an audience. With Jerome, Jane did not know exactly what the motive was; she was far from suspecting that he might ever grow tired of unmitigated Elsie. Perhaps, if he did feel this, he himself was entirely unconscious of it.

To-night, when they were established by the fire and when Jerome, protesting that he had letters to write, still loitered, smoking, with the two women, Elsie said, with an air of sudden recollection:

"Oh, by the way, Jerry. Company next week!"

"Who?" he asked, surprised.

Jane was playing a double-deck solitaire on a green table at Elsie's request. When Elsie felt too tired for any game, or for patience herself, she still liked to watch Jane play. The girl remained motionless, a card suspended in midair, waiting for the news.

"My sister—my half sister, rather—and her husband. The telegram came just before dinner. The Bellamys—you've heard of them, Jerry," his wife said. "Sylvia is my mother's child by a second marriage. It seems that they're motoring with friends from Los Angeles, and the friends have to stop in San Juan for a night or two, and the Bellamys, Sylvia says, would love to stay here. She has discovered that she has a famous brother-in-law," Elsie added slyly, but without resentment, "and I suppose she can't wait to make his acquaintance!"

"A very good reason for wiring her that we have smallpox at Storm House," Jerome, who looked annoyed and uneasy, said promptly.

"Oh, darling, no! They'll probably he here only one night."

"Ah, they'll spoil everything!" he said.

"She's lovely, Jerry. I've not seen her for ten years—she was about eighteen then. But she's lovely."

"How does it happen that she was brought up away from here?" Jane asked in a silence.

"My mother was widowed when I was fifteen," Elsie explained readily, "and she and I lived with my grandmother at Storm House here. About a year later my mother went East and met a man named Archibald—Lester Archibald—whom she married. They came out here on their honeymoon, and my mother's plan was to take me back. But Grandmother pleaded to have me, at least until my school term was finished, and I stayed on here. Just a year later, three months before I was to graduate, my mother had a baby girl—this very Sylvia—and died. So Sylvia's granny brought her up, just as mine brought me, and as neither one of them travelled at all, we haven't seen each other more than three or four times in our lives. Right after Granny's death, twenty years ago, I went East and saw Sylvia; she was a thin little girl with wonderful pale yellow hair. A few days after I got home from that trip——"

She sighed. Jane knew that she might have added, "the illness that made me helpless occurred."

"It sounds to me as if Sylvia was working you," Jerome now said, in dissatisfaction.

This was Elsie's opportunity; she rushed into it.

"But—darling," she said, with wide-opened eyes. "I don't mind anyone's working me. Why should I? I think they're charming to work me, if they want to, and if it means that we will have guests here."

Jane and Jerome listened, awaiting the pause in which they could assure Elsie that that was just like her, but that nobody else in the world would take that point of view.

It was decided that Jane should get the front room ready, and the spare bathroom, and that if the balmy autumn weather continued they would entertain the Bellamys with at least one supper down on the shore. Jerome appeared to lose interest in the subject, and sat staring into the fire while the women talked. But later, when Jane was going off to bed, he said suddenly,

"I'm sorry I got so worked up over that damn' telegram this afternoon. It was all my fault."

"Oh, that's all right," Jane responded quickly.

"We have to make allowance for the days when genius won't burn," Elsie contributed cheerfully.

"Genius has nothing to do with it," Jerome said. "It's my bad temper and my nerves!"

Jane looked at him thoughtfully, blue eyes very childish in her round, youthful, sunburned face with the soft down visible on upper lip and cheekbones.

"I wasn't mad at you," she said, with a confused, youthful laugh. She went upstairs with a lighter heart than she had ever known at Storm House. It had been silly of her to be so cross this afternoon; it was nice of Jerome Delafield to make the overtures of peace.

Carol and Jane had adjoining rooms; the latter had the smaller apartment, but her windows opened upon a broad porch over the dining room, called "the deck," floored in painted canvas, and roofed with an old awning on poles. Jane had her bed out here and there was an extra cot for Carol on unusually warm nights.

The girl could not read in bed, for the deck was unscreened and light attracted flies and bugs. But she was glad to give up anything else for the luxury of lying on her narrow cot in the soft moony dark, looking up at ropes and festoons of stars, and listening to the clish—clish—clish of the short waves down on the shore.

The rounded tops of the pepper trees and the rising

plumes of the tall eucalyptus were soft bulky shapes in the night; sometimes the lights from Elsie's windows tunnelled through the garden branches and touched the under leaves with a yellowish glow, and always Jerome's light lay across the tip of the porch, over the boxed square railing in a golden triangle. He usually read or worked late into the night.

Jane, lying in a delicious state between sleeping and waking, would get a breath of heavenly garden scents drifting upward: lemon verbena and lavender. Or the pungent sweetness of the eucalyptus tassels would cross her porch like a tangible moving presence in the dark. Sometimes the enormous disk of the moon, slipping a shoulder above the wall, gave her a moment of fright; sometimes in the dawn an abalone fisher walked along the shore, his boots clattering on the stones. Often she went to sleep planning a letter full of the romantic details of it all for Grandmother, but by day she was too occupied and too much distracted to write.

It didn't matter. Grandmother only wanted to know that she was safe and happy and not homesick. Grandmother, even though duly impressed with Jerome Delafield's celebrity, was not inclined to be enthusiastic about Storm House. It sounded a dismal place to her, she said; she never ceased to remind Jane that there were plenty of other jobs—plenty of nicer and nearer places, with less exacting and important folk, where she would do just as well.

Jane nad thought it dismal, too, upon first acquaintance. She had come down to Los Antonios upon a dreary summer afternoon, when a dirty wind was whining about the dirty station and blowing chaff and dust along the chalky roads.

Los Antonios was a shabby, poor little village, with

the usual unpainted post office and commercial hotel; queer little shops that did not seem to know whether to sell patent medicines, groceries, calico, or farm machinery and so sold a fly-specked assortment of all; shabby cottages behind weather-beaten picket fences; a terrible, large, wooden school painted mustard-yellow and rising starkly from a bare meadow; languishing gardens half buried in sea sand; and corner lots where gasolene tanks and hot frankfurter stands and fruit stalls testified to the existence of the long highway between San Francisco and Los Angeles.

It all had looked strange and repellent to Jane's unaccustomed eyes: the yawning garage doorways plastered with cheap advertisements; the Tivoli with staring posters of a wild-Western film displayed at its door; the bakery man in his shirt sleeves, perspiringly flinging trays of rolls into the delivery car. "Cheap, shoddy, webfoot" she had said in her intolerant young soul.

But at the end of every untidy lane there rose the beauty of tufted sea grasses and yellow dunes. And just over there lay the strand and the sea. Jane could not deny some sort of beauty, some sort of dignity, to any town that could so claim the glorious blue Pacific.

Storm House was three miles away from the village and stood in its own four hundred acres of land; Bowers Hill, running a sharp tongue of cliff out into the sea, rose sharply to the south, topped with oaks bent close to the ground. But the old house stood on level ground, a hundred yards in from the shore, shut away from the world by a deep garden overgrown with dark shrubs. A whole mile of avenue, lined by peppers, eucalyptus, and dreary dense evergreen trees and banked with heavily leaved bushes, led to the highway. To the north was the magnificent mass of old barns and sheds and stables, fences and paddocks and pastures, an infin-

itely more inviting realm than the house. There were cows here, and horses, a few chickens and doves, and the dogs and cats, calves and kittens that gather naturally about farm buildings. Gulls walked about on the lichened roofs and descended warily into the muddy corrals the whole year through.

Jane had not seen this region upon first coming to Storm House; she would not have believed, at the time, that anything so wholesome and normal could be connected with the place.

She had seen only the ugly house, bay windowed, decorated with millwork embroidery, painted a dull gray, its narrow, shuttered windows looking out from dark, odorous, deserted rooms and reflecting from the garden only the garden's black and dusty leaves, as if they hid their own secrets by mirroring it back upon itself.

The stairs up which, bewildered and disappointed, she had been escorted, were darkly carpeted and rodded; the upper floor was carpeted, too. Her room had looked menacing, ominous, to her tired and homesick eyes, and the sequestered and lonely aspect of the whole place had filled her memory with terrible old stories of murders and horrors generally, staged in just such desolate places.

Dark trees beneath her window, a block of solid shadow falling across the garden from the bulk of Bowers Hill, and a streaked and sanguine sunset blazing between the canyon walls—small wonder that Jane's heart had sunk with utter despair and disillusion and she had been close to tears at the mere memory of her own exultation in getting this delectable job and of her grandmother's high hopes for it.

Trembling with fatigue and uneasiness, she had gone forth to meet this writer who lived in such a frightful

place and his wife and the little girl who was to be her charge. Only a Chinese driver had met her at the station, she had seen nobody else since entering the house; Jane had assured herself already that this was not the position for her, she could not stand it, nobody could stand it; she would have to tell them at once that she was going back to San Francisco to-morrow.

But upon once finding the family, peacefully at tea upon the terrace and hospitably concerned that the "Tuesday" in her telegram had been misprinted "Thursday," the world had suddenly come right again.

True, Storm House had still been in her eyes a weird and dismal place, buried in dark trees, lonely, repellently ugly, vaguely frightening.

But there was nothing repellent about the shy, kindly man with his wildly untidy hair and troubled, friendly eyes, and nothing that was not lovely and cordial in the invalid wife, so capable of putting an unfamiliar Jane at her ease, so sure that everything was going to go well. As for Carol, slender and lightly poised and as delicate as a sweet-pea blossom, Jane had fallen in love with her instantly.

And then there had been tea, fragrant Oolong tea, and toast and jam, and happy, comfortable—even silly!—conversation. They had all liked each other right away, and that helped enormously to make Jane's mind feel settled.

After a while Jerome had taken his baby daughter down to the shore, which somehow had lost its bloody, cruel look, and Elsie had given Jane her first hint of their family story, that story of which she never tired. The writer, Jane had learned, was really only a war-broken, nervous amateur seizing with passionate gratitude the avenue of self-expression that his authorship afforded him, only too pitifully eager to make it his

excuse to remain here, in the protection of the garden forever, away from the world of cruelties and superficialities and wars.

That had been only a few months ago. The girl felt herself a member of the family now, caught just as tightly as they were behind the dark evergreen hedges, under the sombre trees, among the shadows of Storm House. She had been home for overnight visits twice, but never with that passionate rush of eagerness that homecoming had meant in her first dreams.

No, home had seemed the alien atmosphere now, even though Jane had settled down into it instantly, helping with supper, chattering with Grandmother and Grandfather and Uncle Joe and Uncle Peter and Aunt San as she went to and fro. She had found herself thinking constantly of Storm House, of Elsie lying peacefully day-dreaming on the terrace, and Hong, magnificent in white linen, his dark old oily Oriental face concentrated and happy, beating mayonnaise or cutting biscuits. Carol and her adored daddy, of course, would be walking on the shore, the man's lean, tall figure exaggerated by the falling bars of the sunset and by the contrasted smallness of the child.

CHAPTER II

THE Bellamys stayed at Storm House for exactly forty-two hours, arriving at four o'clock on an Indian summer afternoon, leaving at ten in the morning, less than two days later. They proved to be the most thrilling hours that Jane Cassell had known in her almost twenty years.

To Jerome Delafield, and to Elsie, too, even to little Carol and Hong, and Hong's nephew, Too Fah, Sylvia and Garth Bellamy brought something stirring and disquieting; the gloomy old house under the dark trees knew more excitement, more strange emotion, pleasurable and painful, during their brief visit than had been its lot in many years before.

Sylvia, at twenty-eight, was beautiful; Garth Bellamy was one of the most fascinating and handsome of men. The woman was the brilliantly coloured original of what her half sister was only a dim print. She had much of Elsie's look: the long, fine, nervous hands, the clean-cut, aristocratic chin and wide, beautifully sculptured full mouth, the heavy-lidded amber eyes, and the dark line of straight eyebrows that was in such contrast to her fair hair. But with the hair and skin the resemblance vanished; Elsie's hair was lifeless, pale, graying, wound in dull coils about her regal head; Sylvia's was purest ashen gold, vital and scintillant, slipping in brilliant soft showers over temples and ears when it was loosened, wound into a toque of metallic beauty when it was freshly dressed. Sylvia's smooth ivory skin was

alive, too, where Elsie's was leaden and pale, and Sylvia's cheekbones wore two splotches of transparent clear carmine, only a little less bright than the augmented scarlet of her lips.

Her body was slim and long and supple; she dressed it exquisitely in loosely belted silks and garments that were informal with the informality and all the splendid luxury of a harem. Not that it mattered what Sylvia's beauty was or what she wore!

She was fascinating. Not assertive nor chattering nor noisy, but before she had been two hours at Storm House they were all conscious of the quickening and accentuation in the air. It was as if the old mansion, buried in an obscure village by the western sea, had been out of key with the cosmic harmony and the Bellamys had brought it into tune again.

Sylvia liked everything, admired everything, thought the canyon that led down to the water absolutely too much beauty for any one family to monopolize, adored Hong, gathered pink pepper tassels to bury her face in them rapturously. She climbed Bowers Hill to watch the sunset; she exclaimed, with a real and constant enthusiasm that could not but affect them all, over gulls and windmill, and over the great, luscious black figs that dropped on the terrace beside the tea table.

She was frankly a worldling, and she brought to Storm House a breath of the world. With an exquisite lightness she touched upon operas, books, plays, scandals, politics. She knew Jerome Delafield's two slim volumes by heart, and was deeply interested in the forthcoming book. Jane, watching her with a girl's adoring admiration for a somewhat older woman, thought despairingly that Sylvia had found, in this half hour, more intelligent things to say about *Postscript to a Battle* and *Halloway*

Enlists than she, Jane Cassell, and the writer's wife had found to say in months.

"I tell him he must find some more cheerful topic than the war," Elsie said, proudly and fondly, on the Bellamys' first evening as they all sat on the dim terrace enjoying the sea and the moon and the dry, scented air.

"But no!" Sylvia said animatedly; "because he isn't, really, writing of the war!"

"Not writing of the war?" Elsie asked, in amused significance. It was the tone of one who good-naturedly corners an opponent.

"No," Sylvia reiterated confidently, "for Mr. Delafield is writing of life—the war is only his shield! He could go on with that sort of thing indefinitely—because there's so much more than mere war in it all," she asserted.

"I think I should call it straight war stuff," Elsie persisted pleasantly, but a trifle less confidently.

"You're the first critic to make that comment," Jerome said, looking up with as much surprise as pleasure at Sylvia, "and yet—that's what I've been hoping they'd say all the time!"

"But Jerry *dearest*, they're war books!" Elsie protested, puzzled and hurt. Nobody heard her, for Sylvia was saying slowly, as if she spoke to Jerome alone,

"Truly, I think your books have done more *good*—more actual good—than any after-war books I've seen, and I've seen them all!"

"My God, if I could think that!" Jerome Delafield said under his breath. He was silent awhile, and Jane knew that it was because he could not digest the exquisite gratification of this thought too quickly. Elsie immediately engaged Sylvia in spirited debate:

"Not war books? Why, dearest child," Elsie reasoned, "haven't I seen them being born? Haven't I read every bit of proof?"

Jane was not listening to the argument, one-sided because Sylvia took no trouble to defend her point; nor did she have freedom to think long of Jerome's attitude. Her entire emotional capacity was suddenly absorbed by the action of Garth Bellamy.

He had arrived with his wife at four o'clock that afternoon—six hours ago—a smiling, handsome, amusing man of perhaps thirty. Jane had escorted them to the terrace, and with Jerome and Carol had later shown them the strand, and Bowers Hill, and the general direction of the old barns and outhouses.

It was on this walk that Garth, holding her a little behind the others, with a light touch on her arm, had said to her, quite unmistakably, if quite unbelievably, "I didn't know there was going to be anything like you down here!"

Jane had felt her heart spring into her mouth, the words, the significant smile that accompanied them had been so entirely unexpected. She had flushed deeply over the boyish, sunburned little face and had quickened her step just a little, for Sylvia and Jerome and the child by this time had gained some hundred feet upon Garth and herself.

Garth Bellamy had laughed richly and indulgently.

"Ah, Jane, you're my girl!" he had said, linking his arm suddenly in her own.

That had been all of that. For Jane, scarlet and uncomfortable, had detached the arm as casually, as easily, as she had dared, and had lessened the distance between them and the others with a few steps that were almost a run.

She had thought of the episode while dressing for dinner; had decided that the man had only been trying to show a liking for her, to be kind. Just because her upbringing had been old-fashioned and solitary she need not be a fool!

Yet, upon going downstairs it had been impossible to meet Garth Bellamy's eye; Jane had been conscious of a wretched struggle to do so naturally. Her eyelids had seemed actually weighted with iron, she could not raise them, she could not bring any voice at all from her thickened throat. The man's mere presence in the room had agitated her beyond anything she had ever felt in her life.

All during dinner he had increased this feeling by a hundred glances in her direction, harmless enough to the casual onlooker, but fraught with a quite unmistakable, a bewilderingly exciting, meaning for Jane. He could say nothing without a special significance for her; a significance that she not only perfectly appreciated, but that she knew he fully intended she should appreciate.

They had had sand dabs for dinner; sand dabs, artichokes, figs, corn, and Hong's beaten biscuit—"the show-off dinner," Elsie had admitted frankly. It was an ordinary enough meal to the Californians, but to Jane everything had tasted quite different from what it ever had before, or rather had seemed to have lost all taste and to be just so much sawdust in her mouth.

Now, after dinner, and sunk into a deep basket chair on the terrace, she was still puzzled, ashamed, and shaken, wondering confusedly how much of this bewilderment was due to her own imagination and yet quite involuntarily thrilled every time Garth spoke.

Originally she had seated herself next to Elsie and between Elsie and Sylvia. Jerome had flung himself upon a long chair some feet away and was staring at the stars and the sea, and Garth was left only a chair on the far side of Elsie.

But Elsie and Sylvia, as half sisters, happening to fall into talk, in a rather intimate family vein, for a few minutes, across Jane, who naturally could take no part

in this conversation, Garth had jumped to his feet and had quite spontaneously and briskly moved the two younger women.

"Here, Sylvia, take my chair next to Elsie—you two want to talk! Wait a minute—I'll move the pillow—there, that's more like it."

He himself had taken Sylvia's deserted chair, thus placing himself with a single jerk of his seat not only next to Jane, who was very still in the dark, but nearer to her than Sylvia had been. More than that, she could not move, for that would have been to bring herself closer to the women on the other side and perhaps arouse speculations or suspicions in Elsie.

Garth had been but half a minute beside her when he reached over and took possession of Jane's nearest hand. The girl's heart gave a great plunge of terror, and she pulled upon her arm with all the strength she might, without betraying herself by any sudden movement to the others. He did not loosen his hold.

After a few seconds of this Garth said placidly, "My God, what a glorious night!"

"We have to show off our prettiest weather to you. From now on almost to Christmas we shall have nights like this!" Elsie said complacently.

Jane took advantage of her neighbour's quiet tone to wrench violently at her fingers. But they were held in a vise. She relaxed them, lay back in her chair, panting, her eyes—after one furious instant of glaring at Garth—turned toward the sea. The man's big hand warmly, firmly, determinedly encircled her own.

Presently Jane made another quick effort, again unsuccessful. Her breast moved stormily, and her look, glittering in the dark, once more met the shine in Garth Bellamy's eyes.

And, suddenly, an emotion that was no longer anger,

surprise, or resentment swept over her, and she shook with a new sort of fear. She lay perfectly still, trembling lightly, strangely, from head to foot.

Far above their heads stretched the dark foliage of the fig tree. Now and then a ripe fruit fell with a soft little plop upon the terrace. When the air was still the rich, heavy odour of the great furred leaves scented the terrace like some Oriental perfume. But when a breeze wandered overhead, it brought the tonic, aromatic odours of burned grass and tarweed, fresh sharp dews on dusty lanes, and pungent pepper berries.

The stars throbbed, throbbed, throbbed like living creatures. Toward the west there was still a pale glow, reminiscent of the day. Bowers Hill blocked off the south, the canyon's walls rising steeply to meet its high cliff levels. The Milky Way hung low and softly bright, an iridescent scarf blown between the baked, arid land and the high velvety arch that held the stars.

"It makes you feel such an insignificant dot of nothing!" Garth said dreamily in a silence. Jane stirred her fingers; her whole body pulsed as she felt the man's close comfortably upon them.

"Doesn't it?" Jerome said eagerly, sympathetically, moving in his chair.

After a pause of beauty, fragrance, and sweetness, Sylvia and Elsie and Jerome fell into a desultory, low-toned conversation. Then Garth, turning a little, said quietly to Jane,

"You're a San Franciscan, aren't you, Miss Cassell?"

Jane did not answer.

"She's asleep," Elsie, who could attend to more than one conversation at a time, explained amusedly. "Jane!" she added more loudly. "Jane, dear, Mr. Bellamy spoke to you."

"I asked if you were a San Franciscan," Garth repeated.

"Oh, yes," the girl said briefly.

"You've lived all your life in one house there, haven't you, Jane?" encouraged Elsie, helping them along.

"Want me to let go your hand, Jane?" Garth breathed, as Elsie resumed her share in the other conversation. The girl nodded, inexplicable tears suddenly brimming her eyes.

He instantly freed it.

"Mother?" he asked.

With her hand once more her own she could breathe more freely, she could remind herself not to be a fool, not to make a scene.

"Grandmother," she answered with a little difficulty.

"Mother dead?" His quick sympathetic look asked the question rather than any words. "And you live with your grandmother?" he went on, as Jane answered again with a nod. "Just you two?"

"No, my grandfather and my Uncle Joe and my Uncle Peter," she said, "and my Aunt San!"

"It sounds to me as if that ought to be enough to bring a girl up nicely," Garth said approvingly.

His tone made her laugh although she was still quivering.

"They're all greats, really," she confided abruptly, unwillingly, after a moment of irresolution.

"Greats?"

"Yes. My great-uncles and my great-aunt. I'm the only person in the family under sixty," Jane said impulsively, youthfully. "What if he did hold your hand? What if he does like you?" her pulses drummed. "Don't be a fool! He isn't going to hurt you!"

"Why, I think that's the most amazing thing I ever heard!" Garth said. She caught the shine of his eyes, so

near her own. His tone was very low, clear to her, but quite inaudible to the others.

"And how long have you been here?" Garth pursued.

"I—beg your pardon?"

"How long have you been here with Elsie and Jerome?"

"Since—only since June."

They were silent, and the rich sweetness of the fig tree flooded the warm darkness. Jane felt her body light, as if she were floating in the air; she had never seen a night like this before—felt such enchantment upon soul and spirit. A vagrant breath of air from the sea ruffled the heavy leaves overhead with a clothy sound.

"In the East we would say that it was going to thunder," Sylvia said.

"I think that is heat lightning, far off toward the south there," Jerome conceded, rousing from a silence. "We have it sometimes."

Nobody spoke until Sylvia said under her breath:

"What a wonderful, wonderful place! And what a life you people lead!" she added, after a pause.

"We love it," Elsie confessed, with her own pleasant complacency.

The little waves clashed on the beach, pebbles clinked in the wash of outrunning water. Garth caught up Jane's hand again, and this time the browned, sturdy little fingers lay in his own for a full minute before she drew them away.

They were all blinking, bewildered, and silent when they went up to the house at eleven o'clock. The hallways smelled warm and close, and the lighted lamps smote ungratefully on eyes soothed by the summer dark. There was talk of breakfast trays. Jane and Carol would be downstairs at eight, Elsie always had her

breakfast later, on a tray, Jerry did what he liked.

"It's too hot to go in; I'm going to take a blanket and go down on the shore," Garth said suddenly.

"Jane has the best of it—she sleeps on a porch," said Elsie.

"You sleep on a porch, do you?" Garth asked the girl mildly.

"I can fix you up on a porch up at my cabin," Jerome said. "I've an extra bed there."

Sylvia sat on the arm of a hideous old morris chair and rested her beautiful ashen head upon its stuffed cushion.

"Only a bed, indoors or out," she moaned.

"Jane, are the porch beds at the cabin made up by any luck?" Jerome asked.

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Delafield thought——"

"I didn't know but what someone . . ." Elsie supplied. almost too weary to take her usual meed of praise. "Take Mrs. Bellamy upstairs, Jane," she said, turning toward her own door. The men and the young women went off separately; Jane did not get another glance from Garth that night.

Nor did she close her eyes. Sleep had fled her; she was not sorry, it was only too delicious—too enchanting—to lie awake so comfortably in the cool darkness, hearing the sea clish and clish on the pebbles and the high night winds stir the fragrant lofty plumes of the eucalyptus.

The moon set, and the stars paled. Jane heard the old cuckoo clock hiccough five before she fell into a light, exquisite slumber through which Garth Bellamy's voice, the touch of his firm, resolute hand, seemed to penetrate even as they had penetrated through her waking dreams.

He had heard the others say that she would be down for an early breakfast with the child the next morning;

Jane expected that he would join them. She descended the stairs at eight o'clock with Carol fresh and eager beside her, experiencing a certain flatness as the breakfast she tried to prolong moved to its inevitable end and Garth did not appear. She and Carol had no choice but to finish their meal and go out as usual to see the dogs. At nine Elsie sent for them both, and they paid her a visit, and after that they went into Los Antonios to market, Jane driving the little car, Carol beside her on the front seat.

Feeling vague and uninterested and jaded, Jane bought tomatoes and more corn, delicious bronzed muscat grapes, salmon—the Easterners must have salmon, it was one of the luxuries of the market—and alligator pears at fifteen cents each, and artichokes at ten.

Jane stood small and sturdy in the market in her white bluejacket's blouse and pleated white skirt, a white hat pulled down over her brown hair, her shoes a well-powdered white, the only touches of colour in her morning costume the flesh-coloured stockings and the loose blue tie that blew about at her throat.

Italian squashes—they didn't have those in the East—and persimmons—great orange persimmons as big as apples and bursting with pulpy juice.

Her face blazed red with shame. What a fool she had been last night! That mild flirtation had meant nothing to the man; he merely thought of her as rather cheap.

Quail. Elsie had said that they must try to get quail for the Bellamys.

"Don't eat it now, darling—it's so hot. Wait until after lunch," she said to Carol. Carol held the curved, black-spotted banana carefully; it was already getting warm and pulpy in her eager hand, it would hardly last until after lunch. She licked its open tip fondly,

closing the stripped ends down upon the creamy fruit.

Jane went to the post office, returning through the swinging door with a sheaf of mail which she flung upon the back seat. She went to the cleaners', stopped at the drug store. It was nearly eleven o'clock when she and Carol started to drive the three miles home.

Hong and Too Fah came out eagerly to the loaded car; Elsie was dressing when they went in; the day was very hot. Jane settled Carol down upon her bed, dusty little shoes and stiff gingham discarded, a light rug over the small bare feet, and Carol's beloved *Three Bears Book* and her woolly sheep beside her.

"I don't hafter!" stipulated Carol.

"No. But you'll be a darling if you really do go to sleep."

"Jane, will you go out and be sure that they're setting lunch on the terrace?" Elsie asked when she went downstairs again. "Mr. Delafield must be working—I've not seen him—and Mr. and Mrs. Bellamy were going to walk around Bowers Hill. Tell Fah the Italian napkins and the smaller cloth. See if you can manage the silver bowl of fruit—that always makes such an impression on Easterners."

The girl went to the kitchen to fill the bowl herself, with black figs and white, oranges and peaches, plums golden and purple, grapes of half a dozen types and colours, bananas, apples, pears whose yellow waxen cheeks were touched with carmine, persimmons, and small fleshy nectarines creamy and pink. She garnished the pyramid with polished laurel leaves, spilled the grapes to dangle over the silver sides of the bowl and lie upon the tray beneath it.

Then she carried bowl and tray carefully under the grapevines of the kitchen garden, past the whitewashed fences of the laundry yard, and around the corner of

the hothouse to the terrace. Garth Bellamy was sitting there, quite alone except for the comings and going of Too Fah with spoons and glasses.

Garth came to meet her at once and put his hands under hers on the tray; together they steadied it slowly into its place in the centre of the table.

"My word—what glory!" he said, of the fruit.

"Isn't it?" Jane agreed, smiling. Her heart had jumped a little upon first perceiving him, but immediately afterward she felt suddenly cool and sure of herself, and quite equal to the situation.

"What's that?" Garth asked.

"It's a persimmon."

"Good?"

"Oh, yes, they're delicious. Try it."

"I've been eating," he said absent-mindedly, "ever since I got to this state!"

"How did you sleep?"

"Oh, magnificently. It was glorious up there—cool and dark, and what smells! The sun woke me about five, and I came down and went to bed again, indoors."

"I have a canvas tent top between me and the sun—my porch is southwest, anyway," Jane told him.

"I feel very much ashamed about last night," Garth said then, with a sudden laugh. "I don't know how to explain it. Being tired, maybe, and getting to this place—it is the *darnedest* place, you know; I've never seen anything like it!" he broke off, to appeal to her pathetically. "But I don't want you to think I was trying to be fresh. I just felt that for a child like you it must be so darned lonesome," he stumbled on, boyishly awkward and ineloquent, "and—I don't know—I felt sort of friendly to you. I thought—and I do think—that you are one of the nicest girls I've ever seen."

His very embarrassment helped his cause.

"Oh, that's all right," said Jane, a little awkward and red herself, but managing a laugh.

"Then that's that!" the man said in a relieved voice. He glanced at the table, waved his hands. "What can I do?" he asked.

"Nothing. Hong and Fah do everything," the girl said, a little breathless.

"Sit down and let's talk," Garth said, with quiet authority. Jane, sufficiently sure of herself on this dreaming Indian summer morning to be glad of a chance to redeem herself in her eyes and his, after last night, obediently took a basket chair, her bare brown hand hanging over the back as she sat twisted sideways, her honest, earnest blue eyes fixed upon the man's face.

The sun, moving across the south, sent a long mellow bar of shade from Bowers Hill. There was a clear shadowless light on the terrace, but the upper branches of the great fig tree were bathed in sunshine, and beyond the canyon's narrow walls the Pacific was glittering like a broad band of pale sapphires.

"Tell me about yourself," Garth invited her, quite unsmiling now, with the quiet, commanding air of one who has the right to ask. Jane laughed. She was quite willing to talk about Grandma and the other old persons in the old house on San José Avenue. A white old-fashioned cottage—she painted it for him—a cottage standing on a quiet, sunshiny corner, raised six feet above the sidewalk by a wooden bulkhead with an iron filigree fence on top, and with a backyard also fenced, where Uncle Peter and Grandpa had chickens.

Uncle Joe worked, he had a position in a bank. No, not a teller, she laughed honestly; he was only a sort of confidential messenger at seventy-six. Uncle Peter had been injured, fifty-sixty years ago. He was gentle, and

good as gold, and all that, but he was odd. Grandma and Aunt San kept the house and cooked.

Jane, Garth gathered, had not been driven to work by stark necessity. These comfortable old persons whose own lives were well filled with their chickens and their cottage, their Victrola and whist games and newspapers, had agreed, in solemn conclave, that it would be good for the child to find something to do that would take her out of their too constant company.

So Jane had taken a civil service examination at nineteen, and had passed it very well—third in a list of thirty-seven. And she had been immediately placed in a good position, second assistant librarian in what she seriously assured Garth was "one of the nicest branches."

"I didn't want Chinatown," Jane said, "because they never would have let me do night work down there."

And into the nicest branch of the library had come a woman friend of Elsie Delafield to ask Jane innocently if she knew of any young woman who would like the position in the Delafield house. Jane had asked breathlessly if it was the Delafield of *Postscript to a Battle?* Did he live in California? Was there any—was there any chance in the world for her?

The rest had followed. For the excited old persons had agreed with her that here was the opportunity of a lifetime.

"And shall you stay here indefinitely, Jane?"

Every time he said her name her heart seemed to catch its breath.

"Well, as long as they like me," she offered, with her boyish smile.

She flushed and laughed a little as Garth, not moving from her the steady gaze of which he appeared to be only half conscious himself, said absent-mindedly,

"Well, that might be some time." Then suddenly rousing himself from a deep musing fit he said briskly, "Come on. Let's look at the barns and things. How do we go? Through this gate?"

Jane went beside him, under the fig tree and past some gooseberry bushes loaded with transparent, striped pale green fruit. They opened a whitewashed old gate in a long white fence, against which mallows, hollyhocks, and heavy-headed sunflowers were growing, and went down through a little lane on the other side to the farm.

The girl skirted corrals, opened heavy barred doors, let him peep into great hay barns and into stables where horses looked at them solemnly from box stalls. There was a sweetness, an orderliness, a mellowed age about the old place that delighted Garth—whitewashed barns, whitewashed sheds and outhouses and pole fences, clean hay, clean damp floors, harness and tools aligned against softly cobwebbed walls, chickens picking in a smoking great heap behind the stables, spotless milk cans ranged on the dairy shelves. Fine grain was sifted deep upon the cross beams in the granary; pigeons, walking on an upper floor, fanned clean circles upon it with their agitated wings.

High above them the windmill creaked; a cow bellowed, and was still, and bellowed again. The warm, mild autumn sunshine slanted down upon all the fences, yards, doorways, gates, and sloping roofs, and the air was sweet with homely odours. There were Michaelmas daisies burning blue beside the forge doorway; the iron was cold; horseshoes and dark implements and dangling straps of leather littered the dark, earth-floored space. Jane opened one door that showed pears—thousands of pears, ripening on a clean wooden floor.

"What in the name of Allah can you do with all those pears?"

"Those are already sold, I believe," Jane told him. "Pears are a better crop than prunes, just now," she added seriously.

"What does a prune look like, out of a saucer at breakfast?"

"Have you never seen?" The honest little face, with its powdering of freckles on a short nose and the warm, Indian sunburn making the eyes look very blue, was turned to him in surprise. "Here—these are prunes," said Jane, turning aside into a narrow strip of orchard. She bent over, picked two or three purple, dusty plums from the ground, and rubbed them to a violet polish on the palm of her hand. "Try these," she said, watching him interestedly as he bit into the luscious fruit. "The whole crop is gathered from the ground," Jane said, turning back. "They don't sweeten until they fall. Aren't they delicious?"

"They're marvellous!" Garth walked along beside her, wiping hands and mouth on a fine white handkerchief. "This is the most wonderful morning of my life!" he presently added, simply, in a quiet tone. "I've always known there was happiness like this, Jane, but I had to meet you to find it. I'm never going to forget it," Garth added, quite unemotionally. "I shall never forget you—dear. You're different from any girl I ever knew. And after to-day we'll always be friends—won't we, Jane?"

The single word "dear" had been enough to set her on fire again. All last night's trembling, the exquisite weakness and fever and chill of it, returned, and Jane felt her senses swimming and her head confused and stupid.

Blunderingly, uncomfortably, she said the very thing she did not want to say.

"You—don't you forget—Mrs. Bellamy?"

He stopped short in the angle made by two barn walls. Jane noticed that the silver-veined thistles had gained a foothold here, and the sweet, brown tasselled yarrow. Thistles and yarrow . . . thistles and yarrow . . .

"No, I don't think so, Jane," he said, in a tone of quiet surprise. He frowned faintly, interrogating her with his look. "In what way?" he asked intently.

She shrugged, her cheeks hot.

"If *you* don't think so——" she said with difficulty. Her eyes, trying to be proud, to be confident, as they met his, failed, and held only the troubled, questioning look of a child.

"I don't think so," he said decisively. "You may leave that to me, Jane. There's no earthly reason why we shouldn't be the best friends in the world."

And immediately he began to talk of other things: the beauty of the blue sea that they were eternally rediscovering between bits of farmyard, the gulls and the high soft autumn sky across which wisps of fine gauzy cloud were being drawn and stretched like veils. A mist was forming far out at sea; Jane said that they would have fog that afternoon. But it was still very warm.

Beyond the last shed, a low, long chicken house about whose bare yard gray and white feathers were idly blowing, there was a descent of grassy cliff and a cluster of adobe dwellings, clinging almost like an Indian pueblo against the hill. The mellowed plaster of the walls, broken only by shuttered window openings and crossed by narrow balconies, was gilded with sunlight and shadowed by old pepper and fruit trees. In the little lane that formed a street before the houses children and cats and chickens, a goat or two and several dogs were active; two lean horses, saddled in silver-mounted leather and tied under a massive oak tree, were turning restlessly and whisking their tails.

"That's beautiful!" Garth said involuntarily.

"It's so much prettier than the house," Jane agreed ruefully. "They say it's like Spain."

"It *is* like Spain."

"When I first came down here," the girl said, as they turned back, "one very hot moonlight night—a Saturday it was, and they always celebrate Saturdays!—I wandered over here at about ten o'clock. I had gone to bed, but I couldn't sleep—I felt homesick and wide awake—and I put a kimono on, and came over here, and watched them from behind the barn—oh, for an hour, I guess. It was like a play!"

They passed the chicken runs and the barns again, and Garth said seriously, "It's good to be as happy as I am this morning."

Jane made no answer. But she walked along beside him, small and sturdy in her bluejacket's white blouse and pleated skirt, the soft breeze moving the long blue silk tie against her flat boyish breast, and her blue eyes shining mysteriously in her sunburned face.

"But perhaps you're always happy, Jane?" the man suggested.

"I don't know. I think I am. I don't know," she said dreamily. She really did not know, because everything that had gone before to-day seemed far away and unimportant. The quickened beating of her heart, the thrill in her blood, the sense of being light and unreal, floating above life and yet strangely interpenetrated and saturated by its exquisite essence, persisted.

Garth talked to her of plays and books and poems as they walked back to the terrace, indicating not only a knowledge of their significant moments and their meaning, but an acquaintance with their actual writers and actors as well.

"You know I don't know what you *do*, Mr. Bellamy."

"It has to be 'Mr. Bellamy,' I suppose?" he asked, instead of answering.

The tone fluttered her. She answered with what ease she might, "I think so. I don't, somehow, see myself calling you anything else."

"We will fix *that*," Garth promised, with that little touch of male authority that thrilled her. "My business," he added, reverting to her question, "has to do with understandings, contracts, development schemes. For example, we are now on our way to Manila, where I will attend several business conferences. We will then cable our people in the East that everything is O. K. They will then begin to ship us pipe and steel and tools and what not. And I will hang around down there until the last nail has safely arrived. Do you see?"

"But then—how do you know so many writers and actors and people?" the girl demanded youthfully. She laughed. "It ought to be Mr. Delafield who does that," she offered.

"Delafield's a solitary," Garth said carelessly. "With the invalid wife and the little girl——"

"And his own nature. Or perhaps it's the effect of the war," Jane supplied. "But you know he hates crowds —dreads them. He hates suffering of any sort. I never saw a man feel that way before."

"You talk as if you had seen a great many men."

"Well, I haven't, of course. But don't you feel it in his books, the misery he is in when he has to write about pain? That man in *Halloway Enlists*—the man who tried to get home to his wife when her baby came—the man who was shot. Don't you sort of feel what it meant to him to write it?"

"I didn't read it," Garth confessed, watching her.

"Mr. Delafield says himself that he is afraid of the world," Jane said, laughing a little confusedly as Garth's

undeviating stare remained fixed quietly upon her. The colour crept up into her wholesome sunburned face, and the midday light, aureoling her whole head, showed the golden down on her cheekbones.

"No, the reason we know everybody, and are asked everywhere, is Sylvia," Garth said abruptly, beginning to walk on. "She gets 'em all!"

They stopped under the big fig tree on their way back and filled their hands with the ripe fallen fruit.

"It always reminds me—when I pick up figs—of soft little babies' faces," Jane said innocently to Garth, looking up from the silver bowl as they added the figs to its contents. Garth was laughing at her as the others came out to the terrace.

Sylvia, in a sky-blue robe, was spectacularly beautiful in the softened shadow of the big trees, Elsie just herself, as always, graying yellow hair wound severely about her head, spotless cuffs and lawn collar on a silk gown, lean hands beautifully groomed and ringed. Carol was reproachful, hanging on Jane's arm. She *had* gotten to sleep, and childlike, she resented the fact. Jerome, dizzy and blurred from a long morning of work, smiled forcedly upon them all. Jane knew he was exhausted, chilled by the writer's desperate need of rest and food before he could command energy enough even for a single word. He sat down, watching Fah patiently, drumming with one fine hand on the table.

Jane served the salad expeditiously, reached over to put a block of golden cornbread against Jerome's plate, filled his glass with creamy milk, and was rewarded by his grateful, understanding smile as he fell upon his lunch.

"I'm mad about that little Spanish settlement you've got over there, Elsie," Garth said.

"Oh, did you walk over to the farm?"

"You din' wait for me, Jane," Carol said, reproachfully.

"You were asleep, darling."

"No, but that's the kind of house you ought to have, too,—you and Jerome, here," Garth pursued enthusiastically. Over Elsie's face came the faintly guarded, faintly stubborn look that Jane knew so well, the look that meant that Elsie was being just a little bit criticized and was consequently just a trifle on the defensive.

"Jane converted you, did she?" she said drily.

"No, I didn't say a word!" Jane protested, childishly distressed.

"Balconies, whitewash, tiled roofs—it's beautiful!" Garth persisted.

"That's merely the native architecture here, Garth," Elsie said in her informing tone. "This house—old-fashioned if you like," she added, with a movement of her graying braids toward the bay windows and scalloped millwork of Storm House behind her—"was a landmark in the county when my grandfather Storm built it, fifty-five years ago. People used to come for miles to see it. Whereas the adobe houses," she went on, "are commonplace—every old rancho about here has one or more of those old places on it. Not a bathroom to a hundred of them!"

"Nevertheless, I like them," Garth said, smiling. And he began faintly to whistle.

"I know *Jane* likes them," Elsie admitted lightly.

"Garth, stop whistling," said Sylvia.

"Darling, it was Chopin."

"I don't care what it was—it's a desecration, here in this divine air, with that ocean making love to us and these figs falling into our very mouths."

Serving the salmon she had bought wet and fresh on the waterfront only an hour or two ago, passing the

cornbread, laughing as she bent down to Carol's eager whispering, Jane felt a wave of joy run over her, a very inundation of deep content. The balmy autumn sunshine, the whisper of the sea down at the canyon's mouth, the dark layers upon layers of clothlike fig leaves motionless in shadow overhead, and the contented group on the terrace, Elsie's fine nervous hands, Sylvia's unearthly blonde beauty, Jerome's gravity, his quick, intelligent look and rare, quiet speech, and little Carol's affection and eagerness—all seemed held in a globe of strange light, of enchantment, all seemed a part of her own largeness of mood, or she a part of them.

And vitally close to the heart of life was this last figure, this handsome, negligent, quick-spoken man of whose appraising glance she was always happily conscious down to the very depths of her being. She did not speak much, she was content merely to drift in this new element that so far eclipsed in glory anything she had ever dared to dream before.

The men's talk went on about her; Garth and Sylvia had chanced to cross the ocean with a certain British poet; Jerome could not hear enough of him. They spoke of other poets, and Garth, in his own quick way, yet with arresting expression, quoted Patmore's lines:

> So, till to-morrow eve, my own, adieu,
> Parting's well paid with soon again to meet,
> Soon in your arms to feel so small and sweet,
> Sweet to myself, that am so sweet to you!

And as she heard his strangely haunting voice repeat the simple words Jane felt as if she would choke, felt as if the slowly rising suffusion of blood, from heels to temples, would drown her.

CHAPTER III

THE enchantment continued, lingered. It irradiated the world when Jane took Carol upstairs at three o'clock to get into walking clothes; it seemed a part even of the commonplaces of lacing her shabby walking boots, buttoning on the khaki shirt and knickerbockers, pulling down the shabby brown hat that the brush and brambles of Bowers Hill could not harm.

It had been arranged that Carol should accompany her elders only until she felt tired, but the event proved that Sylvia was not any too eager for a real scramble; Jerome was always content to wander comfortably along the shore rather than attempt to make any definite pilgrimage or have time a consideration, and in the end the quintette kept rather closely together and covered only a lazy half mile or so of rocks and strand, stopping whenever a starfish, or a bit of seaweed, or an unusually beautiful tide pool attracted their attention.

"I want to send you some books, Jane," said Garth, walking along beside her.

She looked at the sea, the gulls, the dim, soft blue sky, and the figures of Sylvia and Carol and Jerome silhouetted against the cliff a few hundred yards away, and she felt wings in her heart and on her feet.

"I think I can get them in San Francisco," Garth said.

His firm fingers reached for hers at a bad step on the stones; the tide bubbled in over the rocks, filled the tiny pools, and waved the translucent green and bronze sea

grasses. There was a constant surge and hurry of waters about their feet, a circling of waves, a crying and fluttering of gulls, and the collapsing of the yellow bubbles of foam on the tide line. The air was sweet, dry, and scented with the cliff grasses and the spicy shrubs that clung precariously to the higher rocks.

"I will write to you," Garth said after a while.

He extended his hand again. The others were out of sight now; conscious of what she was doing, yet with an odd heady singing in all her senses that kept her from analyzing its significance, that kept her from coherent thought at all, Jane let her fingers rest in his an instant —another instant.

Their eyes met. And she saw the colour come up into his face, and felt it in her own.

"My God, Jane," Garth said then, in a whisper, "I am sorry about this, my dear."

The flame swept them both, they trembled, standing close to each other on the warm, level rock, shut away from all the world by the walls of the cliff and by the sea.

"I'm sorry, too!" Jane said breathlessly.

Was she acting? She did not know. She was conscious of the drama that enveloped her, that had caught her unawares, the unquestionable emotion that was stirring in her blood. But beneath it all she was conscious, too, of a strange, dangerous girl-impulse not to disappoint him by falling short of her own share of this exciting conversation, a desire to say and look what he expected of her, a belief in her own security, her own safe position as an onlooker, as contrasted to his own violent feeling. What harm in it—what harm in it—as long as one always knew one could stop?

"Will you write to me, Jane?" the man asked, a little incoherent, his tone very low.

She could stop this whenever she wanted to. She could stop this whenever she wanted to. And meanwhile, how delicious to feel herself small and boyish and pretty, looking straight up at him, to feel the currents of youth, vitality, and utter well being thrilling through the hands he held in his own.

"Should I, Garth?" she asked simply.

It was the first time she had used his name. She saw him shut his eyes for a minute, as if he drank the music of it into his soul.

Then, after a puzzled look he asked, as simply as she had, "You mean—on account of Sylvia?"

"I suppose so," Jane answered with difficulty, her cheeks scarlet.

"I wish," Garth said, after consideration, "I could give you an alphabetical list of that girl's affairs!"

Jane laughed in sudden relief.

"Write me letters I can show her, if you like," the man suggested as they walked on.

"I'll do that." Jane laughed again.

"I'll write you from Honolulu, and from Manila," Garth said in a businesslike tone. "We go to-morrow. You'll have your books—some of them anyway—from San Francisco."

They were going to-morrow, of course. Jane's heart felt an odd, inexplicable sense of relief. The little game, if game it was, would be played out to-morrow, in the commonplace morning sunshine, when she and Garth said good-bye. Of course it wasn't quite fooling—it was really a sort of falling in love, and she had never done that before—but after all he was a married man. Nothing could come of all this; no matter how serious it was, she could stop it at any minute that it threatened to do an injustice to Sylvia, and meanwhile it was exciting—tremendously exciting.

The murmur of the sea was telling a thrilling story, and the gulls were crying it. The warm sun seemed to be running like quicksilver in her veins. She stepped springily on the sand and the big rocks, her feet spurning the ground.

The others had come into view again, nearer, and returning. Jane waved a hand; the space between her and Garth widened.

"You know what one of the world's great lovers said," Garth began pleasantly, as they rested against a great rock, waiting for the slowly moving trio. "He said that, in dying, our one great regret would be for the splendid sins we did not dare to sin."

Jane was silent. Deep within her she felt a wholesome impulse of protest. But it would spoil the play to moralize now!

"Don't forget," Garth began again in an odd, lifeless tone, "those letters that I am to show Sylvia!"

"You don't *have* to show them to her, of course," Jane reminded him, with an artless straightforward look from dancing eyes.

He scowled, looked away.

"My God," he said moodily, "I wonder what you think I am made of! Let's stop fooling, Jane, let's stop playing. I am mad about you—you know it."

"You can't say those things to me," she said steadily, quietly, as he paused, ashamed and confused, with averted eyes.

Neither spoke again until the others came up.

"Jane," said Sylvia, sitting down on a rock and scraping her pretty shoe with a water-scoured white stick, "has Garth been making love to you?"

Jane's heart leaped, but she sent Garth an amused look as she asked, "Does he do that?"

"*Does* he?" Sylvia echoed significantly.

"Jane is entirely able to protect herself," Jerome Delafield said kindly, affectionately. "She appears to be one of the lucky women who were born with their heads set straight on their shoulders."

"If he got no further than I got with you, Jerome," Sylvia said, bent over and viciously jerking and scraping as she spoke, "he did not get very far!"

"I had no idea you were trying to victimize me. Your technique is so perfect, Sylvia," Jerome said mildly, "that there is no machinery in sight. Why didn't you tell me?"

"To tell you would have been to spoil it," said Sylvia. "These things are delicate matters, not to be coarsely discussed!"

"But we might have discussed it finely," Jerome argued.

They were all sitting on the rocks now, facing the declining sun.

"Are you tired, my darling?" Jane said in Carol's ear.

"Odd to see the sunset across the ocean," Sylvia commented. "It looks all wrong. It ought to be setting behind us."

"To-morrow night you'll get another aspect. You'll be going down the coast here, at about sunset," Jerome observed.

"And I shall be as sick as a dog," Garth said.

Jane turned sympathetic blue eyes to him.

"Oh, do you get seasick?"

"Vilely seasick," he assured her.

"He feels horrid the first day," Sylvia amended it, "and then he's fine. Crossing the north Atlantic last January we had a frightful storm, and we were all wretched. You've made that trip, Jerome?" she asked.

Jerome's face whitened a little.

"In 1917," he answered briefly.

"Where were you on the other side—Argonne?" Sylvia asked interestedly. Jane's shabby little walking shoe moved a few inches in the loose sand, touched the other woman's foot significantly.

"For a while," Jerome said. There was a silence. Sylvia, after a quick glance at Jane, said no more, but continued to stare dreamily out toward the thickening opal veils that screened the western horizon.

Carol had established herself in her favourite place in her father's arms, facing forward, a small hand curled tightly about each of his big thumbs, and Jane, seeing his gentle, intelligent face drooped to kiss the child's soft hair and the pain in his eyes and the little frown on his forehead, felt a swift pang of pity for the kind, big, clever man who had been so broken on the wheel of war.

He looked up, caught her glance, and smiled.

"One tries to get away from the memory of the whole mess," he said to the party at large.

"I know!" Sylvia agreed in quick sympathy.

Garth began to recount his own wartime adventures, as an irresponsible young marine, at twenty-four, demoralizing and yet vivifying every group into which distracted superiors relegated him. Immediately they were all laughing at him; Jane had thought his a handsome face upon first seeing him yesterday; she found it more than that now. There was something merry, amusing, normal about it that was irresistibly likable and attractive.

The house had again captured the warmth of the day when they went back to it, and Jane's room seemed to her small, close, and dull in the late afternoon light. There was to be no tea this afternoon; they were to substitute an early gipsy supper on the shore. Jane, taking a freshening shower herself and superintending as

usual the child's bath and change of dress, was conscious of a sudden mood of anger and rebellion. The Bellamys were going to-morrow, and they would never think of her except as that perfectly inoffensive, negligible little governess, down at the Delafields'. What could she ever do with her life? What could she achieve or hope to achieve, buried down here in such a place?

Tears of irritation and despondency stood in her eyes. She looked at herself in a mirror that was crossed and recrossed by unflattering bars of afternoon light.

"My face is spotty and greasy, and I'm common-looking!" Jane said sombrely to her reflection. "You insignificant thing! You never travel, you'll never go to Manila or cross the north Atlantic, you'll never know anything about plays or books! You're perfectly satisfied to be a servant in a writer's family, and some day you'll be fired and go back to the library again.

"I thought being a companion and governess to the Delafields would mean that I met interesting people and did thrilling things," she brooded, scowling at herself. "And yet Sylvia, whose husband is only a sort of agent —or salesman—or something—gets it all. Mr. Delafield's life is just about like everybody else's in Los Antonios. I'll never do anything as long as I'm here, I'll never meet anyone! And I'm twenty already. I'll be old in no time. I'll be thirty in ten years. That's not old, of course, but it's too old to have any fun."

And she was stabbed by a sudden vision of Sylvia, with her slim body and ashen hair, queening it on a big ocean liner, watched, admired, courted as she went to and fro, wearing her beautiful gowns, smiling her radiant smile.

Carol ran downstairs ahead of her, and Sylvia called to her from her opened bedroom doorway, when Jane went out into the upper hall. Sylvia's big handsome

suitcase was opened on the bed. She was packing, wandering about in a filmy dressing gown, her beautiful pale gold hair—how very short it was! Jane thought—brushed back into a cloud on her neck.

"I got some coats and things in Los Angeles," Sylvia said musingly, "and where I am to put them I don't know! Look at those old things there, Jane," she added, "I've had to crowd them out."

Jane obediently picked up the indicated garments, and spread each in turn, eyeing them admiringly. A quilted black silk coat with a band of white fur for a collar; a small wine-coloured sleeveless velvet dress with a belt of brilliants; an evening gown of corn-coloured silk cut into petals, with a crystal-beaded blue flower, shaggy and glittering, on its shoulder.

"I've been trying to get rid of all of those—I shall have no use for them," said Sylvia carelessly. "And the instant I saw you last night I said to myself that you were the girl to use them!"

"Oh, Mrs. Bellamy!" Jane stammered, overwhelmed. Her mood of five minutes ago was completely forgotten, her heart surged with amazement and delight.

"They'll fit you," Sylvia said, trying to deprecate her thanks.

"Oh, fit me! Oh, they'll be perfect!" Jane fairly sang. "But are you sure—are you sure——"

"I'm positive I won't have use for any of them!" Sylvia cut her short, very definitely. And passing her, the older woman encircled Jane's sturdy young form for half a second's quick embrace, a heartening, affectionate touch that warmed Jane's soul. "I'm glad you like them!" Sylvia said, matching gloves, as she stood at her bureau. Jane sat down, holding her new treasures, her eyes luminous with pleasure.

"I've never had such beautiful things!"

"That velvet," Sylvia agreed, with a nod and a glance, "is pretty. The coat I had copied from a French coat. My woman in New York did it for me. But the velvet is from Paris. You can see the hooks on it. For some reason the Frenchwomen always put regular harness hooks even on the most delicate gown—and very few of them. The New York houses are terrors for lines of invisible snaps and hooks—perfectly maddening to get into!"

Jane turned the little gown, found the single big hook that would hold it in place, and gave a little wriggle of anticipatory joy.

"I'll love it!" she said.

"Well, you'll get some fun out of them," Sylvia conceded more moderately.

"Are you—are you terribly excited about sailing to-morrow, Mrs. Bellamy?"

Sylvia opened a beautifully fitted toilet case, looked at its contents thoughtfully, snapped three or four transparent little handkerchiefs into one of its flat moiré pockets.

"No," she said irresolutely. And then more definitely, "No. I like the trip well enough, I've never seen Hawaii," she added, "and a good ship is always nice. But I don't—particularly enjoy——" She was speaking slowly. She halted. "I don't particularly enjoy the prospect of staying months in Manila," she added, and was still.

Arrested by her tone, and looking up in surprise from a fond contemplation of her new garments, Jane stared at her blankly. Sylvia had flushed; now the colour ebbed from her face, and she walked to a window and stood staring out into the afternoon lights upon the overgrown shrubs and trees in the garden.

"There's somebody—there are so many persons that I hate to leave," she said quietly.

Jane thrilled with a sudden and understanding sympathy.

"You mean one specially—one special man?" she asked, timidly.

"Oh, yes, and no. I don't know what I mean!" Sylvia said, in a tone half whimsical and half desperate. And with an angry little sob she added, "It's all such a farce! It's all such a *farce!*"

Jane was stupefied with amazement and shock, anxious only not to have Sylvia think her unresponsive, not to have this confidential overture repelled.

"What—what is?" she asked, clearing her throat.

The other woman's back was turned; she was still staring out of the window. The room was warm and airless in the Indian Summer afternoon. A triangle of blood-red sunset light lay upon the dull papering of the wall.

"Everything!" Sylvia said impatiently, resentfully. "You ask me if it's a man. I suppose it is. It's more than that; it's what means life and breath to me—my world, my own people."

"Do you mean you don't want to go away—from New York?" Jane asked after a silence.

"Not New York—not any place!" Sylvia said, despairing of making her understand. "But to do what you don't want to do," she said in a quick undertone, speaking as if to herself, "to be with persons you don't like, meeting strangers who are nothing to you, dressing to impress—nobody!—constantly under pressure, constantly baffled and defeated."

She was silent, her back turned, and Jane was silent. The red triangle slipped on the wall.

Then Sylvia turned and came over to Jane swiftly and sat down beside her on the bed, laying nervous fine fingers on her wrist.

"Jane," she said, fixing her with a strangely intent look, "does this place seem—queer—to you?"

"You mean—Storm House?" Jane said, almost in a whisper.

"Storm House. It has seemed to me, since I got here yesterday," Sylvia said momentously, "one of the most dreadful places in the world!"

"Dreadful?" Jane faltered.

"To me. I feel things here that I have never felt anywhere," Sylvia said. "It's as if this place had been calling me—all my life. Upon me—all the time—is that feeling one has sometimes, of having been in places before—said the same words before! I'm in a dream here. It's wonderful, Jane. It's like being through the looking glass—like being dead. But I wish I had never come!"

Jane sat petrified, allying the wild words to her own passionate feelings throughout the last few hours.

"I see what I am, here," Sylvia said, laying her hand on her breast, "I see the common, pleasure-hunting little fool I am! Well, what of it?" she demanded, her tone and look rising to Jane so fiercely that the younger woman actually jumped with fright. "What of it? What is it to me that I'm not domestically settled in some nice ten-room house in Plainfield, New Jersey, or Scarsdale, New York? Is that virtue, necessarily? Suppose I *had* half a dozen children, they might mean nothing to me! They mean nothing to plenty of women who go right on bearing them. He—he is so made that childhood and books and the sea——"

She fell silent, finishing the sentence in her own thoughts.

"He?" Jane said, bewildered.

"Does he make you want terribly to be—different?" Sylvia asked suddenly, moodily, out of a long silence in which Jane was afraid to repeat her unanswered mono-

syllable. The younger woman could only frown questioningly, venturing a puzzled "*Who?*"

"He—he—he!" Sylvia repeated impatiently. "Jerome! Well, no matter," she said, suddenly regaining her self-control and resuming her usual manner as Jane continued to stare at her completely at a loss. "Now mind, Jane," the older woman said conversationally, beginning once more to pack her bag; "mind, my dear, I'm not in love with him. On the contrary, I don't like him! He makes my flesh creep; he's much too good for *me*. But there is something about him—his patience, his sweetness—especially when Elsie is in the pulpit, or when that child's with him."

"Couldn't you ever have a child?" Jane asked, to say something, as Sylvia's words once more sank into thought.

Sylvia regarded her darkly for a full minute. Then a certain half-pitying and half-scornful amusement lighted her amber eyes.

"It was something like that," she said drily. And Jane flushed as if she had been detected in some inexcusable stupidity.

"I like you," Sylvia said suddenly, putting her arm about Jane. "Run along downstairs now and see about supper, and don't worry about me. Don't look so tragic, Jane," she said, laughing.

"I'm only sorry if you're not—happy," Jane said slowly, on her feet.

"I am twenty-eight," Sylvia said cheerfully, tucking the long silk fringes of a Spanish shawl into place in the suitcase. "And I have never been happy—not for an hour, not for a minute!"

Jane gathered the new gowns,—her new gowns—on her arm slowly, went slowly downstairs. She felt as if she were moving in a strange world, where emotions

and excitements lay in wait for one at every turn. Through the looking glass indeed!

They had supper on the shore, in the last of the soft daylight. Elsie was propped in cushions and rugs with her back against a conveniently sloping rock, the gray and pearl and scarlet streaks of the sunset visible to her over a trembling metal sea only when she turned to blink at them over her shoulder.

Jane, assisted by Garth, made a small circle of stones in the sand, lighted a fire of silvery smooth driftwood. The scarf of the smoke wound upward gracefully in the motionless air, and its good odour mingled with the sharp, delicious smell of the boiling coffee.

Sylvia sat in a crevice of the shelf of rocks that spread itself upon the sand; she was not far from Jerome, who with Carol was arranging details of the feast, but Jane noted that she hardly once addressed him, or even glanced his way.

The Chinese boys, in shiny white linen, brought them buns and chops; Jane toasted the split buns and Garth buttered them with a small brush. The girl's face, warmed by the fire into a real gipsy beauty, was filled with only good-fellowship and happiness to-night; she and Garth had much to say to each other, but it was all open, all joyous and easy and of the moment. The coffee was poured, the cream made a blop-blopping sound as it broke in clots from the throat of the fat Canton pitcher.

To finish the meal there were blocks of rich, dark, spicy gingerbread; Jane, eating hers, was nevertheless otherwise busy in jamming papers and leavings upon the little fire, in demolishing the last traces of the meal as briskly as she had assembled them. Carol was again in her father's arms, and Jerome placid and silent, with

his pipe and his daughter, on a seat that was half sand and half rock. Sylvia resumed her place, Elsie had not moved, and Jane and Garth presently returned from brief trips between rocks and surf and settled down, too.

The hour needed no words, and no one spoke for a long while. Even little Carol was still. Little waves slapped and seethed against the rocks, the tide was slowly making; the ocean was pearl colour, vast and soft; it stretched like veils heaped upon veils toward the opal of the horizon. The sun was too low to touch the water, now, but all the western sky was splendid with apricot and rose. Little galleons of clouds sailed across the sunset, and crisp, lead-coloured curls of them, just above the sun that was splitting the world with gold, were edged with liquid pink.

The picnickers on the sands were so still that gulls walked curiously close to them, their twisting little feet stitching the sand with long triple seams, their plainly carved bodies reflected in the shining shallows of the slipping and curving tide. Far to the south, beyond the long arm of Bowers Hill, Purisima Light flashed pink in the twilight, was gone, and flashed again.

"Do you ever sing any more, Sylvia?" Elsie said unexpectedly. Even to herself her voice was a surprise.

"Oh, Elsie—fancy your remembering that!" Sylvia said lazily. And for a full moment there was silence again.

Then suddenly, not loud, but exquisitely clear in the dimming and softening world, Sylvia's mellow soprano filled the air:

"Alone upon the housetops to the North.
I turn and watch the lightning in the sky,—
The glamour of thy footsteps in the North,
Come back to me, Belovèd, or I die!"

Jane's heart closed with a spasm of ecstasy, opened again; her whole body seemed to turn to liquid fire and melt into the universal, agonizing beauty of the world. The camels—she could see them in the hot bazaar nosing their hay; she could see the captives of the raid, braceleted, veiled women, wild and silent with fear, crouched on their bundles and rugs, lights shining in their eyes.

"Come back to me, Belovèd, or I die!
My father's wife is old, and harsh with years,
The drudge of all my father's house am I—
My bread is sorrow and my drink is tears.
Come back to me, Belovèd!"

Jane's hand was in Garth's again now, and he was holding it warm and firm; it did not flutter, nor did the blue eyes she turned to him in the dusk—blue eyes burning with pain and perplexity and a most reluctant acknowledgment.

When the song ended there was another pause, fragrant with sweet sea scents in the night and punctuated by the even fall of the little waves, and then Elsie said:

"Jerry, isn't that a lovely voice? Sylvia, do sing something else. . . . I believe Jerry and Carol are both asleep," Elsie added in a lower tone, a second later.

Sylvia, in a proud, bored tone, declined to sing again.

"Evidently the Mexicans over at the farm are going to have a gay time to-night," Garth said as a distant peal of laughter and the faint throbbing of a guitar were borne to them on the breeze.

"Oh, yes. Saturday nights there's usually a wedding or something," Elsie said indifferently.

"'Come back to me, Belovèd, or I die,'" Jane said slowly, aloud.

"Kipling, isn't it?" Elsie asked.

"I beg your pardon, Elsie?" This was Sylvia, a thousand miles away.

"Aren't the words of that song Kipling's?"

Sylvia yawned, sighed.

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"Yes, they *are* Kipling's," Elsie stated firmly.

There was a silence.

"We must wake them, they'll catch cold here," Elsie said then, touching Jerome's arm. He roused himself with a great sigh of protest and was immediately persuaded to carry the child up to the house and go to bed himself. "I'll need your arm, Garth," Elsie said, with that genuine simplicity and fineness that the realness of her need always displayed in her.

Garth had time for a dozen low words in Jane's ear.

"Can you come out again? It's only a bit after nine. I want to see that Mexican wedding. Couldn't we——"

"I'm afraid not." She shook her head. "I have to get Carol to bed, and after that Mrs. Delafield may need me."

"Try. I'll wait. It's our last chance, Jane. I won't—I won't frighten you," Garth promised.

The assurance frightened her more than any omission of it could have done, yet it was a thrilling and enthralling sort of fright, after all. Jane followed her employer up to the house with her whole being on fire, helped to undress Carol, tumbled her, sweet and sleepy and sandy, into bed, darkened the nursery, and went down to Elsie's room like a girl in a dream. She did not seem to touch the old stairs as she descended; hands, feet, head, body, all felt light and floating. Her thoughts would not be captured; they swam away again and again into a world of pure emotion.

Elsie was in a capable mood, concerned about an

early breakfast for the Bellamys; they would have to catch the nine-o'clock train from Los Antonios.

"I can drive them in," Jane said, to be obliging.

"Why, why should you, Jane?" Elsie asked with a repressive look. "Jerome will certainly——"

It was all tiresome. And it was utterly disheartening to leave Elsie presently and discover that Sylvia was in her room, with the door shut, and Jerome and Garth walking up and down the terrace, smoking and talking.

There was no place for Jane but bed. The men were using the porch up at the cabin. They would go up there together, Garth would be under observation now until he went to sleep. Jane slowly undressed, slowly assumed her Chinese pajamas and brushed her hair, omitted her prayers—she had not been able to pray last night, nor had she even thought of prayer to-day—and got into bed.

She lay awake for a while, sprang out of bed, and went cautiously to the porch rail, peering down toward the terrace. The two dots of red light that were the men's cigarettes were still moving to and fro; a few minutes later, with their voices considerately lowered, they went past the house and along the path that led to Bowers Hill and the cabin. The nursery clock, audible through Carol's opened windows, struck ten.

A sense of her own limitations angered Jane; she felt herself a coward. She would go tamely to sleep, and the heat, noise, and music of the Mexican wedding would go on in the little smoke-blackened adobe houses over on the farm, and Garth Bellamy would sail for Manila in the morning.

"You don't dare take any fun. No wonder you never have any!" Jane said to herself in scorn. "Any other girl in the world would be walking over there with him now. What harm could it do you? You coward!

"If you were in Spain or Mexico you'd go fast enough, and everyone would say how fascinating it must be to see the natives in their religious ceremonials. He wouldn't hurt you. How could he with his wife right here? No, you're just an old maid, afraid of friendship because it happens to be with a man! If it were a girl you'd be funny, companionable, and intelligent enough.

"You've just thrown it away. He'll not write you now, and he'll not send you books, because you're a timid, narrow minded—— You're worse than that! You've got the sort of mind that imagines that every man who meets you is trying to kiss you."

"Jane," Garth Bellamy said, close beside her.

The world gave a great plunge and turned over, and Jane, panting like a wild creature trapped, turned glittering, frightened eyes upon him in the soft moonlight that flooded the sleeping porch.

He seated himself on the edge of the bed, one hand touching hers reassuringly, laughter as well as warning in his almost inaudible voice.

"Jane, don't be frightened. Get up and slip into something and let's walk over to the farm!"

"How—how did you get here?" she breathed.

"Just walked up your porch steps here. Come on, it's too glorious to go to sleep."

"Oh, I can't! And you—oughtn't to be here," said Jane.

"Get into a sweater and skirt," he urged. "Come on. It's only ten o'clock!"

"Oh, I oughtn't!" she whispered. But she was not frightened now.

"Why not? Plenty of people stay up later than this! Jerome's asleep," Garth told her, "and Sylvia's sound. I just stopped at her door. I thought she might like to go. But she's forty fathoms deep. So you and I'll go, and we'll tell them about it in the morning."

So presented, it seemed harmless enough. Just a crazy boy waking a crazy girl for a little night adventure. The moonlight, the warm tree shadows, the scent of autumn sweetness—tarweed and dew and ripening apples—on the dark air, all fired Jane's courage and stirred her emotions.

"I'll wait for you down here at the bottom of the stairs," Garth whispered, departing.

His head had no sooner descended beneath the level of the upper step than she had sprung out of bed; it took her only seconds to find her stockings, her sturdiest shoes, to jump into the white pleated skirt and pull a woolly white sweater over her head. And all the time her thoughts raced excitedly, and the sense of not failing the demand life made upon her, for adventure and daring, sang in her veins.

"Suppose Mrs. Bellamy or Mrs. Delafield *should* open that door and want to know what I was doing? I'd only have to say I couldn't sleep and was going to take a walk on the sand. It's true. And to-morrow it'll all seem so simple. We'll tell them about it, and they'll wish they had gotten up, too!"

Crossing the porch, she had a single second of misgiving. Suppose she leaned over the balcony rail and said to Garth, waiting for her at its foot, "I'm sorry. I'm going into the nursery, to sleep with Carol."

And suppose she really did do that, waking up the drowsy child to make her own resolution all the surer, lighting the light, reading in bed for a while. Garth would hardly dare approach that door. . . .

"Coward! You're afraid of living!" Jane said to herself, banishing the thought resolutely.

She went down the narrow wooden stairs from the porch, and Garth's fingers caught hers as she reached

the grass plot below. A confiding, boyish, slender figure, the white sweater and brief skirt glimmering dimly, she leaned against him in the dark, and Garth put his arm about her and guided her. And after that Jane had no further thought of turning back.

CHAPTER IV

"YOU'RE a good little sport to do this!" Garth Bellamy said, when they had crossed the terrace and were out of any possible hearing from the house.

The careless tone and the careless words vaguely offended Jane. She wanted him to think this important, somehow—significant.

"We go through here to the farm," she said uncomfortably, stiffly, indicating the terrace gate under the fig tree.

"Oh, my dear, I just took a look over there, there's nothing going on!" Garth assured her. "All as dark and quiet as the grave."

"Oh, well, then!" She drew back a little, puzzled and uneasy, her fingers still linked in his.

"But you and I are going down to the shore," he said. "Just for ten minutes—just for five! And then we'll say good-night like the well-behaved persons we are."

She did not like it, quite. But she allowed him to lead her, with those firm warm fingers of his, down the natural stairway of rocks that led to the beach, and settled herself in one of the stony and sandy seats that had held the picnic party only a few hours before.

Garth took his place beside her, half sitting and half lying on the slanting shale in the moonlight. And immediately he put his arm about her waist.

A sudden deep distaste for the whole adventure rose in Jane's heart; she did not feel frightened, nor that she was in danger, but she felt ashamed and bored. The

flatness, the stupidity, of having sneaked away from her comfortable little bed, to come down here to the shore, to have this married man kiss her, touch her, turned her soul away from his coldly, dispassionately, almost with dislike.

She gently, firmly loosened the encircling arm, and Garth appeared content to have it fall idly from its embrace.

"I hoped we were going to have all the fun of that Mexican wedding!" Jane said, disguising a deep nervousness with a regretful conversational tone. "I've known, ever since I came here, that they had great excitements over there sometimes on Saturday nights."

He was looking at her, eyes shining close to hers in the moonlight.

"Oh, is that so?" he said in a significant, teasing sort of voice as she paused.

"Yes, that's so!" Jane said, with a baffled little laugh.

"Well, I like this better than ten thousand Mexican weddings!" Garth murmured, bringing his shoulder, with a little change of position, to rest against her own, and again steadying her with an arm about her.

"Don't talk that way—don't frighten me," she pleaded seriously, "or I shall go in!"

"Does this frighten you?" He did not change his position, but he began to talk in a way that quieted her uneasiness and gave her once more the feeling of friendship she liked so much.

He talked of cities she had never seen, of persons she did not know, and yet it was always with a certain personal air that seemed to bring them to Jane, to lay at her feet whatever he had gathered of interest in his journeyings about the world. Behind everything he said he made her feel an acute consciousness of the miracle

of charm she was to him, this rare and lovely and amazing friend whom he had discovered in an old country mansion beside the Western sea.

"But you'll go everywhere yourself, Jane, and meet everyone. You have it all written in your face—what you are, what men are going to see in you!" he said.

She sat sobered, impressed, seeing her own destiny in the years ahead.

"I only wish—I knew how!" she said wistfully.

They were silent. Then Garth said, in a low tone,

"Lying there in the moonlight you were like the loveliest little Greek boy that ever breathed!"

It made her uneasy again; she moved restlessly against his arm.

"You shouldn't have come up there!" she whispered, happiness and fear and excitement pulsing through her being like swift tides.

"Kiss me," Garth commanded her simply.

Jane was on her feet in a flash, moving along the strand, with the man instantly beside her. He caught her shoulders, squared her about.

"Kiss me!" he said again. And his lips closed the words down on hers.

For an instant, in the strong embrace that was scented with a fine, intoxicating hint of shaving soap and tweed and tobacco, she was carried off her feet. Then pushing him away, although still held by him, she said breathlessly, blindly,

"You mustn't—do that!"

"Why not?" he demanded, surprised and amused.

"Sylvia," she stammered. She had not meant to name that name; the suffocating shame of the woman who has deliberately cheapened herself overwhelmed her. Flat—stupid—common—to come down here on the strand to be kissed, embraced, by Sylvia's husband!

"My dear girl," Garth said in a low, unhurried voice, holding her, shaking her gently by the shoulders, "did we come out to-night to discuss—Sylvia?"

"Well, what then?—what then?" Jane asked her own panicky heart. What, in the name of all girlish foolishness and madness, *had* she come out for? To go as far as she could, that was it, and yet to preserve, untouched, what she called her honour. A cold contempt for her whole weak, impressionable sex arose in her, and she was still.

"What are you afraid of?" Garth asked, still with that air of carelessness, of knowing her own helplessness far better than she knew it.

"Nothing!" she said stubbornly.

"Then why do you hold me off so, Jane?" he asked. And as still she did not speak, he added, amusedly reminiscent, "Do you know you're like a poor little girl I talked to in New York—years ago."

The story offended her horribly; she said quickly: "I think that's *tragic!*"

"The girl herself was tragic, if you like," Garth admitted, a little daunted by her manner. "But don't you think the story was funny?"

"I hate you to tell me things like that!" Jane exclaimed explosively, after a moment of silence. "I hate men," she added, passionately, "and the way they feel about girls!"

"When men feel about girls as I feel about you, my dear," he said, in a suddenly changed low tone filled with affection and respect, "it's the most beautiful thing in the world. Life isn't anything to be afraid of, Jane. You and I have found each other. We can't throw that away; it would be sacrilege!"

Jane walked a few steps restlessly away from the house, turned back.

"Sit down here and talk to me!" Garth said.

But she would not sit down, and they remained standing for a few aimless minutes, the man obviously vexed, the girl puzzled and distressed.

Then suddenly Garth put his arms about her and kissed her again. But she would not yield; there was no response in her own kisses. She said anxiously and awkwardly that they might at least walk up to the fig-tree gate and see if anything was going on in the cabins, and upon reaching the terrace level she bid him a brief, uncomfortable good-night, and went away from him, in the dark, toward the outer stairway that led up to her sleeping porch.

She hesitated at the foot of the stairs, thinking perhaps that he would call her, follow her, plead with her. But he did not, and Jane went upstairs with her mind and heart in the most violent tumult they had ever known.

For a minute she sat on the edge of her tumbled bed, panting, her face blazing. Uppermost in her mind was a burning sense of humiliation. What a little rustic fool he must think her! What an amateur, indeed, she was! She had followed him out into the moonlight to-night to play with love, as all girls did, to be teased and kissed, to hint of, to speak of the things she did not dare to do. And she had betrayed in five minutes, in one, her utter inability to live up to the situation, her awkward uneasiness and apprehension.

"You old maid!" she said contemptuously to herself, half aloud, "you poor, scary old maid! No one will ever fall in love with you.

"He didn't want to hurt you. He just wanted you to be friendly! You poor prude!"

He had been almost in love with her this afternoon. He must despise her now!

"And yet," said Jane, hastily undressing, groping for her pajamas again, "what didn't I do? What did he want? He seemed so cross, he seemed so scornful of everything I said."

About to get into bed she stopped short, frozen with apprehension. For there was a low light burning in Carol's room. Jane, not knowing what she feared, went quickly across the porch and through her own room and stood, transfixed, in the nursery doorway.

Carol was sound asleep, but the bedside light was indeed lighted, and in the rocker near it, his hands idly locked, a Japanese wrapper of black and gold striped silk worn loosely over his pajamas, was Jerome Delafield.

Jane came toward him at once, and the circle of light illumined her small figure, also in pajamas, and her anxious face and aureole of ruffled hair, and her bare feet. Her expression was stricken, aghast.

"Was she—sick?" she whispered.

"Ah, there you are, Jane!" Jerome said simply, getting to his feet, "Yes, she was fretting, and I happened to come down from the cabin. I've been sitting with her. Too much picnic," he added, not meeting Jane's eye, but bending over the child to adjust a light covering.

Jane was crimson.

"I'm so sorry! It was so hot—I went down on the terrace——" she began, stammering.

"Oh, that was all right," Jerome said politely. "You'll be with her now, will you? She's all right, but she may waken again."

"I'll sleep here on the couch." Jane followed him to the door, made an impulsive gesture as if she would detain him. "I'm sorry. I was just below there on the terrace!" she said miserably.

"I know—I heard your voices," Jerome said, in the

same quiet, indifferent tone. And immediately afterward he was gone.

Carol turned and muttered; a cold breeze came in through the open windows; Jane heard the side door, downstairs, softly closed.

She stood turned to stone, in the centre of the floor, for an eternity.

"They will discharge me to-morrow. And sooner or later everyone will know why!" she said after a while, half aloud.

The next morning broke strange and dull with a fog blowing steadily in from the sea, the trees dripping about Storm House and on the deserted terrace, and the gulls piping eerily in a sunless world. Elsie, coming out most unwontedly for an early breakfast, exulted that the guests had gotten the best of the whole season's weather.

"We couldn't picnic to-day!" said Elsie.

Sylvia looked odd and businesslike in tweeds, with a small hat on her brilliant fair hair and a fox skin slung carelessly about her slim shoulders. Jerome was as usual, but he was always quiet, and Carol, boisterously convalescent after a tossing night, had been persuaded to stay in bed until the sun came out.

Jane was in dark blue this morning, dark blue skirt and dark blue blouse with a black tie. She appeared pale and tired, and spoke and smiled with a quite visible effort, lapsing instantly afterward into a profound abstraction. She looked at nobody, and reached the breakfast table only a few minutes before the others finished their meal and the party was scattered.

Garth Bellamy had complained of headache, and had made Elsie laugh by observing that he already felt sea-sick.

"Lord, what a ghastly day to go to sea! Fog!" he said disgustedly, more than once. He superintended Hong and Too Fah, as the Chinese brought suitcases downstairs. Jane and he avoided each other's eyes.

Presently the actual moment for good-byes came. Elsie was out on the steps now, a Spanish silk shawl of watermelon-red about her shoulders. Garth kissed her, and Jane could see from her quick flush and the little protestant upward jerk of her head that she liked it.

"Good-bye, Jane, and thank you all—we've had simply a corking time!" he said in a businesslike way, shaking her hand, not looking at her. And immediately, with a boyish good-heartedness that both Elsie and Jerome afterward praised, he ran upstairs to say good-bye to Carol.

Sylvia, in her smart little suit, sat on the top step beside Elsie for a minute, and the half sisters murmured farewell before kissing each other. Then Sylvia, looking straight into Jane's eyes, and without smiling, put a gloved hand on each of the girl's shoulders, and kissed her, too, while she said, lightly and significantly:

"Don't waste time worrying about—anyone who isn't worth it, Jane!"

The scarlet rushed to Jane's face, and her throat thickened. But she laughed as she said bravely:

"I won't!"

And confusedly she thought, "What shall I do? What does she mean? How much does she know?"

Sylvia went down to the car and got into the front seat beside Jerome; Garth packed himself and the luggage in the back; the engine, suddenly roaring upward, drowned their last thanks and good-byes.

"Well, I *think* that was a successful visit," Elsie said with a long sigh.

"Oh, wonderful," Jane agreed lifelessly.

"Come into my room, there's something I want to talk about, Jane," Elsie said then. Jane, with a sick heart, followed her.

The house looked dark and gloomy in the cool early morning, a dismal quiet pervaded it. The tumbled breakfast table, revealed in the strengthening light that came in through the high, rep-curtained windows, had an appearance of desolation.

Elsie's room was more cheerful. While Elsie climbed back into bed, Jane snapped open the door of the air-tight stove and flung two or three short logs within. The fire roared instantly, a warm wave of air stirred at once.

"Jane, it's chocolate at night. It's chocolate every time," Elsie said firmly. "We have *got* to stop it. She can have a little milk!"

Carol's mother was talking about Carol's diet. Jane could have laughed at her own flat sense of anticlimax. The girl looked apathetically at her employer and nodded her head.

"It was chocolate the last time, and it was chocolate that made her sick at the Cutter child's party," said Elsie. "At breakfast, yes. At lunch, yes. But late in the afternoon or evening, chocolate is forbidden!"

Jane was stupidly, heavily moving about, straightening magazines—work basket—newspapers. She felt dazed and light-headed; she was hardly conscious of what the other woman said. Every few seconds her thoughts reached Sylvia, and her heart chilled and sank. If they went on to Garth, she was conscious of an inner wincing, a drawing away. She could not think of Garth.

Oh, what did it matter—what did it matter—what did it matter! She wouldn't die of it. She would be home, in the old-fashioned white cottage in San José Avenue to-morrow—any excuse would do for the

indulgent old people there, to explain her return. They would never know that she was a marked girl. Oh, straight enough, technically pure enough! But marked, just the same.

She was still in Elsie's room, a flying trip to the nursery having ascertained that Carol was asleep, when Jerome came back. He sat down in a chair by Elsie's bed.

"Feeling terribly tired, dear?"

"Not a bit!" said Elsie brightly.

"Well," said Jerome thoughtfully, "I think it was a successful visit."

"Why don't you fire me and have done with it?" Jane thought scornfully. But instead he merely asked her rather wearily about some telegrams from a publisher, expected yesterday,

"Two days like this just play hob with my work!" he said with a great sigh.

"And you were up with that poor sick baby all last night!" Elsie added. "How did you happen to get there?"

"Why, I remembered that Garth and I had gone out for ice the last thing last night," Jerome explained, "and I couldn't remember closing the ice-box. I knew we couldn't get any more until to-morrow, so I came down to see. And then I heard her whimpering."

"Jane was asleep?" Elsie asked, with a glance for the girl.

"Jane didn't get there until after I did, and then I turned Carol over to her. Well," he said, departing, "I'll have to make a bluff of working, anyway!"

"We can talk the Bellamys over at lunch," Elsie said. "I'm going to rest all morning."

Jane followed Jerome into the hall and through the side door, stopping him on a patch of fog-drenched lawn under the dining-room window.

"Mr. Delafield," she said, suffused with hot colour and almost suffocating as she spoke, "there's something I'd like to say about last night."

"What?" he asked, as she stopped speaking. His tone was one of genuine surprise.

Well, what indeed? What could she say?

"It was only—that it wasn't—as bad as it looked!" she burst out desperately. "You—you can discharge me, of course, if you wish," Jane rushed on; "but I wanted you to know——" She stopped short again.

"But why—why should I discharge you?" Jerome asked patiently, simply. "There's no reason why you and Garth shouldn't walk about the grounds if you want to. It wasn't late. Good heavens!" he exclaimed, colouring in his turn, "you didn't think when I told you I'd heard your voices last night that I was *annoyed* about it? I was distressed about Carol, that's why my manner may have impressed you as abrupt. I didn't care. What you do," he said, with a courteous little half bow, "isn't—I wouldn't consider it—any of my affair!"

Jane stood still, her eyes dropped, her small fingers rubbing a pointed fuchsia leaf to and fro.

"You're awfully kind to me!" she said, very low. "He asked me to go down and see the usual Saturday night rough-house at the cabins," she added. "I—of course, I shouldn't have gone."

"I don't know why not. After all, the man was a guest," Jerome argued. "I don't know why he didn't speak of it to me," he added; "didn't think of it, probably. You were extremely decent to go!" he said.

Jane laughed forlornly, looked up with wet lashes.

"You're very kind to me," she faltered again.

"I hope I am, my dear," said Jerome, in his mild, fatherly manner. "But I confess I cannot exactly see why!"

So that ended that, as far as he and Elsie were concerned. And the two other principals, Sylvia and Garth, boarded their ocean liner that day, and sailed completely out of the quiet radius of Storm House.

But Jane Cassell found that she had been poisoned, and it was many a long weary month before she recovered from the infection.

Not even in her own heart did she call her feeling for Garth Bellamy love, but she knew, as the winter drew on, that she was a woman "disappointed in love," nevertheless, and no heroic laughing at herself seemed to help her to throw it off. The thought of Garth held her like a possession; she could not escape it. His words rang in her ears until she was sick with the sound of them, and the various spots in the garden and shore especially identified with those murmured passionate words that had transported her from a commonplace world to a sort of Fool's Paradise were hateful to her now. She could not look at them.

Instead she took to watching for the mail. Two days after Garth's departure three books arrived, with his card. But there was no word on it, and the mail never brought her a letter wearing a foreign stamp, not in all the long weeks. She never once missed the date of an incoming mail steamer.

At Christmas time she went home, secretly determining not to come back to Storm House. It had become insufferable. But the old cottage in San Francisco was worse; it seemed stuffy, close, and tame after her porch above the sea. She missed the sound of the water, she missed Elsie and little Carol, Hong and Fah. Above all, she missed the quality Jerome gave to the quietest country evening: the flavour of books, the scrap of academic debate, the gleaning from some obscure magazine.

The first balm to her lonely, aching heart came, oddly enough, when she took Jerome into her confidence. He was so utterly removed from passion and intrigue himself that he made an ideal confessor.

Jane did not tell him deliberately, nor all at once. In the beginning a casual hint from her that Garth Bellamy had been attracted to her so amazed and interested him that she could not resist the temptation to go further, Jerome naturally getting the impression that this had astonished her, as it did him.

The fascination the topic had for him, she knew, was purely academic. Jerome knew little of girls. He could hardly believe that another man, spending only a few hours under his roof, could seize that brief opportunity for such desperate love-making. He turned it over in his mind for weeks, occasionally asking Jane some innocent question about it.

"Poor Garth, now—of course he knew it was hopeless, Jane?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Because," Jerome would argue patiently, "his wife was right here, you know."

And then one day, musing about it, making an occasional allusion to "fellows that do that all the time—always falling in love, and seeming to get such a kick out of it," he said:

"Lucky thing for you that *you* didn't fall in love with *him*."

Jane could not resist the sympathy that was so close, and so impersonal, and that she needed so much.

"Well, you see," she said, colouring brilliantly, "that was it. That was what made it—makes it—so hard for me! I couldn't seem—seem to help myself."

They were walking on the shore on a cold, still Febru-

ary afternoon, Jerome helping little Carol to keep her footing on the rocks. He stopped short.

"Oh, but, Jane, that—that wasn't so good!" he protested, really shocked.

"No, of course it wasn't!" she admitted quickly and sensitively. "It was terrible."

"But, Jane," Jerome pursued, staring at her, small and sturdy, looking like a child, with bright colour whipped into her cheeks and her soft ruffled mop of brown hair curling up against the sides of her rough tweed hat, "in that time—a few hours—how do you mean? That couldn't have been *love*," he floundered, perplexed.

"No, I suppose it wasn't!" she agreed. "But—but it has taken me a long time to get over it!" she burst out miserably.

"You mean——" He scowled, gave her a sharply inquiring look. "You mean it really made you unhappy?" he inquired, almost timidly.

"Oh, unhappy!" Impatient and angry tears came to her eyes, and she walked away from him, across the rocks.

When he and Carol rejoined her, it was for the long stretch of smooth sand on the other side of Bowers Hill.

"Elsie," Jerome said; "she didn't know anything about this?"

"Oh, no!" Jane said restlessly, with distaste, "of course not."

"Sylvia?" he asked quickly.

"I think so. She probably is accustomed to it, in him," Jane made herself say bitterly.

Jerome said no more at the time. But more than once, afterward he showed, by brief allusions to it, how much it was in his thoughts. One night he asked her if she corresponded with Garth.

"Oh, no," she answered promptly. "And I don't feel badly about it any more," she said.

"Then it wasn't the real thing!" Jerome decided, in relief.

The girl laughed a little ruefully.

"Is it ever?" she asked cynically.

The man was silent for a few moments. Then he scratched his head for a second boyishly.

"Well, Jane, I've often wondered!" he confessed simply.

They were at luncheon, a meal that Elsie often omitted because of her late breakfast in bed. Carol had already flitted away to inspect the two diminutive turtles Jane had brought her from Chinatown, after a recent visit to San Francisco, and Jane and Jerome were loitering over their dessert.

The writer, as usual at this hour, was relaxed and rested by his meal, and yet still too jaded, after the long morning's work, to feel any particular impetus toward a fresh start.

"With me," Jane said, "it was like a sort of wild fever—a blaze and a roar—a sort of craziness."

Jerome watched her attentively. Autumn rains were falling heavily upon the old garden, and the high branches of the eucalyptus and pepper and oak trees, above the garden, were waving in a storm. Hong had lighted the pink-shaded lamp and set it on the centre of the lunch table, and by its soft light Jerome could see how blue her honest, childish eyes were and how youthful the brown curve of her cheek with the shell of the dark hair curving against it. He could see the soft fuzz on her upper lip and along the smooth-cut line of her chin.

"Jane," he said, with that half-fatherly and half-professional interest that characterized his attitude

toward the whole affair, "it wasn't the first time, was it?"

"You mean the first time I fell in love, or thought I did?" she asked.

"You'd . . . you'd had affairs before?" Jerome offered.

"No, that was the trouble," Jane explained. "I'd never *looked* at a man before. I hadn't had a chance, really, for my grandmother and grandfather and aunt——" She laughed. "You can imagine how they watched me!" she interrupted herself to say with an eloquent shrug. "And then my Aunt San's oldest son is the superintendent of the public school I went to, and one of his daughters was my mathematics teacher, right straight through, and they all used to warn me and scare me. I wouldn't have let a boy give me a lift home for anything in the world! It used to mystify me—how girls got interested in boys, and how sure they were of themselves!" Jane finished innocently.

"I can imagine that," Jerome encouraged her, nodding.

"What worried me was that I thought I might be an old maid," Jane further confessed. Jerome laughed aloud.

"And then suddenly, after just a few hours, to be carried right off my feet—to lose *all* my bearings," the girl said, and stopped short, reddening and embarrassed.

"Ah, well, it's a pretty powerful incentive," Jerome commented drily, pursing his lips, watching the circles of smoke from his cigarette rise into the mellow lamplight.

"It—taught me something," Jane told him soberly; "I never want to feel like *that* again!"

"It would be possible to have a perfectly happy

married life, to have everything in the way of confidence, companionship, affection for a—well, a person of the opposite sex," Jerome said, thinking it out, "without that. That's just the—physical illusion."

"I never knew it existed," Jane said artlessly. "I mean the breathless part of it—the feeling that you are floating—the—the——" She stopped, unable to phrase it. "Why, the leaves you step on in the garden, and the sunshine, and just brushing your hair all seem to be part of it!" she stumbled on.

"Wonderful, just the same," Jerome said involuntarily. "It never comes at all to some persons," he added reflectively.

"It's hard to forget," she said seriously. And ruefully smiling, she added, "There seems to be no rhyme or reason *to* it! But this is the part that I can't seem to understand," she went on in a lower tone, looking down at the hand that was idly playing with her silver napkin ring. "It doesn't seem like—love. Not what you read and think and believe about love! It doesn't just affect you when you think of that one person." Jane stopped, looking up with a faint, puzzled frown.

"No, I know what you mean. It is a universal sort of experience," Jerome said. And presently he added thoughtfully, "That would be a hard thing to put into a book—a girl's idea of what love is, and her first experience with it."

CHAPTER V

GRADUALLY, as the early Western spring came to Storm House, the pain cooled out of her heart, and Jane, older and wiser, could put last autumn's burning experience behind her as a thing learned and to be forgotten.

She would always be ashamed of her share in it. But she could not quite be sorry that a man had loved her passionately, violently, and foolishly, even for a few hours, and had taught her own ignorant self to love in return. It might never come back for anyone else, that blind glory and breathless delight, but it was something to have had it, and to know for all time that it did exist. Hard as it had been, it had helped her to realize her own entity—to find that inner creature that was Jane Cassell, that was to be with her, to grow in her, all her days.

She read it into books, this new knowledge. Elsie and Jerome had long ago drawn her interest to Browning and Patmore and some of the American poets, Emily Dickinson and Louise Imogen Guiney, but last year these had seemed merely jinglers to Jane, fortunate coiners of exquisite phrases. Now they were the very voice of life. Her Shakespeare was new, the commonest love story held for her now a message it had not held before.

The cure—for one March day, gathering lupin and poppies on the cliff with Carol, she knew suddenly that she was cured—gave her a curious sense of kinship with

Jerome. He had been cured, too, at Storm House, of a hurt worse than hers, and he felt, as she did, a certain timid clinging to the place that had saved him. Jerome never wanted to go away, and, of late, Jane had shared the same instinctive feeling. She was safe and happy here, sleeping upon her open porch whenever the weather was not actually forbidding, awakening like a child to a fresh interest in the simple events of the day, laughing with Carol, laughing with Hong and Fah, wandering about with the child through the farmyard and under the trees, discussing with Jerome chickens, cows, essayists, meals, with the impartial attention of the dweller beside the eternal sea, the eternal mystery that dwarfed all others.

It was a life not without pin pricks for a girl of twenty, pin pricks that were principally connected with Elsie, always resolutely and sweetly the martyr, the peacemaker, the adjuster. But even here Jane's intuition, keener than Jerome's, found ways of making the situation easier in many little ways for them all.

"She likes it—she wants just that," she said to the man shyly, quickly, one day.

"Likes my growling?" he asked, surprised.

"Yes—that's just what she wants," Jane said. "She likes things to go wrong."

"Elsie!" he said incredulously, staring.

"Yes." And she elucidated it briefly, with a little opening motion of her hands. "So that she can fix them," she said simply.

Jerome regarded her for a minute.

"I'm not sure but that you're right," he said slowly, pursing his lips.

"She likes to have you take those white pills she thinks are so wonderful for headaches," Jane went on. "She's told me a hundred times of the afternoon you

went to sleep with your head on her arm and nearly broke it with cramp."

"And I've never forgiven myself for it!" he ejaculated.

"She likes to have Hong in, to tell him things to make you comfortable," the girl pursued. "It's—it's all she can do, after all," she finished, a little timidly.

A quick, pained expression of pity and sympathy crossed his face, and he put his hand over his eyes.

"Poor darling!" he said under his breath. And then, appealingly, he added, his eyes reproachfully fixed on Jane, "But after all, she has done it all. She's *made* me comfortable—too comfortable! Everything—everything here is her doing,"

"I know. But just the same she likes—tangles," Jane persisted. "It's just—my idea," she added shyly.

"It's a very good idea," Jerome said, struck. He added nothing more at the time, but Jane was amazed and touched to see with what imagination and skill he humoured his wife's fancy for management and service from that very hour.

He would bring to her bedside a small plate with some dessert on it.

"Elsie, taste that. Usually I'm crazy about his apple pies. But what's he got in there?" Jerome would demand plaintively. And Elsie, capable, nodding mysteriously, would only request that Hong be sent in to her some time in the afternoon; "she could fix *that!*"

It was even better when Jerome forgot the line of a poem, or some needed passage in a book.

"Elsie, can you remember what 'plain living and high thinking,' comes from?" he would ask. Or, "Elsie, which play is it in—that ass of a lawyer who has a sort of comedy rôle? I know it's Shakespeare, but I'll be damned if I can put my hand on it."

And then the faded face against the pillows would brighten, and the dull eyes flash with interest, and Elsie's hands would begin to gather up the cards of which she was already tired.

"I'll find it, Jerry! I know exactly where to look."

Her complacence, when she did find it, her quiet little air of never failing her husband, or anyone else, was maddening to Jane, and Jane sometimes suspected was trying to Jerome, too. He was too shrewd an observer of human nature, too keen in his analysis of it, not to feel that. But he never showed it, and Elsie was happy, and that was the main thing.

For Elsie, it became evident as the spring warmed and deepened and poured in a luscious green tide over the garden, was not going to get better, was never going to be well. Old Graham, the doctor she had had since childhood, came to see her three times, now, in a month, instead of merely paying her the perfunctory occasional visit of a year ago. Elsie was always blithe and contained after his calls, admitting nothing.

"Tiresome! I had a bout like this two or three years ago, Jerry, if you remember?" Elsie would say. "Nothing for it but patience!"

"And of that," Jane said one day from a hassock on the floor beside Elsie's bed, where she was assorting embroidery silks, "you have an unlimited store!"

The sick woman liked praise, from any source.

"I?" she asked, smiling. "Do you think so?"

"Oh, you're marvellous!" Jane said.

Elsie's eyes looked mysteriously through the walls, her thin hand moved caressingly on the slim black book she handled so much.

"'I know that my Redeemer liveth,'" she said simply. Jane felt a healthy instinct of embarrassment. Was Elsie sincere? Was she partly acting?

"But then," thought Jane charitably, "which one of us isn't acting all the time?"

Elsie took to having long, leisurely afternoon talks with the old clergyman who had been her mother's and her grandmother's friend. The old man would leave her with tears in his eyes.

"I tell him that the doctor says that there is no reason why I shouldn't live for twenty years," she would say afterward. "But what are a few years, anyway?"

Jane was inclined to have a reaction of impatience, but Jerome would send his wife a quick, uneasy look when, musically and amusedly, she expressed herself after this fashion.

"Why, you were a lot sicker than this four years ago, Petty," Jerome might say gently.

In the end they were all, even Elsie herself, taken completely by surprise, stunned with the suddenness of a blow which came quite without warning.

They were out on the terrace on a certain exquisite April afternoon. The air was actually hot, the sea a stretch of palest blue satin, and the great trees that shaded Storm House were in tender green leaf, through which delicate shadows moved and were still. Between the terrace and the farm region the white fence had been newly whitewashed, and against it Jane had trained straggling, delicate lines of sweet peas.

One of those golden days, flawless in warmth, perfume, and beauty, was holding them all in its spell; Elsie and old Dr. Graham were silent, Jerome was stretched in a long chair, dozing with his hat over his eyes, and little Carol was walking an inverted satin poppy to and fro on the fresh grass, murmuring an occasional conversation in her play.

Jane was sitting on a canvas cushion, near enough to the child to contribute a word or a suggestion to the

game now and then, half asleep in balmy air and warm afternoon silence.

"We didn't find the seven-letter word meaning 'aware,' did we?" Jerome said lazily, reverting, in a long pause, to last night's game. "Come on, now, Doctor, you're smart. A seven-letter word meaning 'aware,' and it has to have a 'd' for the fifth letter. Wasn't that it, Jane?"

"Fourth," Jane said, after a moment's calculation.

"Mrs. Graham——" the doctor was beginning, excusingly, idly, when suddenly a quick movement on Elsie's part changed the atmosphere into one of stark tragedy and brought them all to their feet in terror.

"Doctor!" Elsie said, choking. And then, clutching Jerome's arm as he grasped her, and leaning, panting heavily, against him, she raised smiling, sinking eyes to his. "This is it, Jerry," she said clearly, unalarmedly. "This is it, dear!"

She seemed to drink strength from his eyes, so close to hers.

"Doctor!" the man said hoarsely. "Quick—it's nothing. She's faint."

He laid her back in her chair. Her eyes were closed, she seemed to shrink and shrivel in their very presence. The glasses she had been wearing slid over the unmoving silk at her breast, clinked on a stone hidden in the green, green grass. Jane had a strange quick thought that it would not matter, now, if they broke.

Jerome was kneeling, his face buried against her shoulder, one of her lax hands held against his lips. He looked up, and Jane thought that never in her life had she seen so ghastly a face.

"Fainted," he said in a whisper to the doctor.

The doctor, laying down the wrist his fingers had been holding, faintly shook his head.

"We must get her into the house," the old man said to Jane.

"But, my God, she was speaking to us only a minute ago!" Jerome said frantically. Jane caught his arm, spoke in his ear.

"Mr. Delafield—we'll do everything. But will you take Carol away?" she said. "You know we don't want her frightened."

Jerome got to his feet, looked at them vaguely.

"Yes—yes," he said dazedly, "she mustn't be frightened."

Carol had risen from her flower play and was looking from her mother's collapsed body and unconscious face to all the other faces in turn, a dawning uneasiness and fright in her eyes.

"Come with me, dear. Mother's fainted," Jerome said to her, taking her hand. They went off through the farmyard gate together.

The whole world seemed oddly changed with Elsie dead. Jane was conscious of a steady surprise that the lean, sickly recluse had been so important a figure in her small world. All Los Antonios came to do her honour, and scores of muddy, comfortable cars drove in from all the outlying ranches, from Santa Lolita, and Salinas, and all the neighbouring towns.

Elsie lay in state in the downstairs bedroom that had been her own, the old-fashioned shutters drawn at the window; the sunlight, swimming with golden motes, came through chinks and cracks, mellow sunlight that sent a queer light into the apartment. Jane, solemn and scare-eyed, dressed Elsie's hair, and in her folded fingers set the three creamy rosebuds that Carol had gathered for "Mummy."

The doctor's wife had carried Carol off, at first, to

play with her grandchildren, but Jerome appeared to be anxious and fretful at this, and Jane herself went and brought the child back, to move about the disordered house quite cheerfully and entirely unaffected, with her small hand tight in her father's. Jerome was restless; he knew few of those of the old families who came mournfully into the downstairs chamber, darkly dressed, plain country women, who stood looking fearfully at Elsie's sleeping face, and sighed, and whispered to each other, and followed one another slowly out into hot sunshine and flower scents again. He would not enter that apartment unless he could be sure of being alone there.

It was for Jane to greet arriving visitors and to pilot them through the halls. Afterward she stood with them on the narrow, ugly gray porch for a few minutes, or perhaps asked them to sit down and have glasses of water, glasses of gingerale. They had come a long, dusty way. The stout women, panting in their limp dark voile dresses, drained their glasses gratefully and looked at her, small and grave and useful, with curiosity.

"I guess you aren't Mrs. Delafield's sister?"

"No, I'm—I was—a sort of companion—governess to Carol."

"For pity's sakes."

"I guess she don't sense much of what's happened?" some other woman might say, heavily.

"No, she's only four."

"She's only four, Mama."

"For pity's sakes."

"And then," Jane might add, "her mother being ill so long, she rather depended on her father, anyway."

"Says that Mrs. Delafield being so sick, Mama, she sets a lot by her father."

"Will you have a little more? It's so hot to-day."

"Oh, it's terrible. Thank you. Well, I don't know but what that's a dispensation, Florrie. Child that age . . ."

And then reluctantly, "Well, we'd better be going. We'll be at the church to-morrow. My father thought the world and all of Dr. Storm. They've always been fine people, the Storms."

It was in these days that Jane came to see for the first time that Jerome Delafield, who had been lost to sight for so many serene and happy years, the man who had crept broken and half mad out of the world to Elsie's knees, and had been soothed, and healed, and in the end loved, by her.

It was not that he was selfish or stormy in his grief; he showed no grief whatsoever. But he did show a nervous, apprehensive, bewildered helplessness infinitely more alarming. He seemed dazed, unable to think or act for himself; the man's fine intellect was temporarily eclipsed, he moved and spoke like a man in a dream.

Only with Carol was he at all himself, and Jane and the doctor contrived to keep him as much with the child as possible.

"Can you go on here for a while?" the doctor asked Jane, a few days after the quiet funeral.

"I suppose I *must*, Doctor," the girl said anxiously. "He simply couldn't manage alone, for a while anyway."

Outwardly, he was living his usual life, disappearing to his cabin for work hours in the summer mornings, coming down chilled and hungry and nervous for lunch, going off for lonely walks afterward, sleeping on his wife's bed late in the afternoon, and attempting to work again at night. Usually he played with Carol before her bedtime, and sometimes he took her with him to the shore; he ate, apparently he slept, quite as before.

But there was an absent-mindedness in his manner, a strained look in his eyes that made Jane uneasy. She began, herself, to feel the infection of his strange moods, to feel the lonesomeness and gloom of the old house, even in broad summer, with the figs ripening over the terrace, and birds and bees busy in the garden and in the cherry trees.

One day, when Elsie had been two weeks dead, he came down upon Jane and Carol, who were on the terrace, with a look of frenzy—of desperation—in his eyes.

"Jane, I can't write!" he said. "It's all gone from me! It's just words, words, words, milling around and around. It's been that way for days," he said. "I don't know what to do!"

She was frightened herself, but she did not show it.

"That's just nerves," she said soothingly. And then, persuasively, "Mr. Delafield, wouldn't it do you good to take a trip somewhere? Honolulu, for instance, or Mexico—anywhere that would shake you up—give you a change."

He considered it a minute, troubled and frowning.

"That would mean meeting people," he said restlessly, "talking to them!"

She laughed a little forlornly.

"Well, that wouldn't kill you!"

"The world does kill me," he muttered under his breath, as if he spoke to himself. "But no—no," he went on, almost pleadingly, like the unhappy child he so often seemed in these days. "Why shouldn't I stay here! I'm happiest here—this is the place that agrees with me!"

Jane looked at him, her face red.

"Well—you see—unfortunately——" she said. "I had to talk to you about this, anyway."

She hated to tell him; it all seemed so stupid and petty, in the face of his grief.

"You see, *I'll* have to go—now," she offered timidly.

"Where?" Jerome asked, quite in the dark. Drawn from his own thoughts, he looked at her almost with impatience.

"To San Francisco—home, I suppose," she said lamely.

"What for?" the man asked sharply.

"Probably——" She tried to laugh about it. "Probably because you are a man and I'm a woman!" she said desperately.

He bit his lip, scowling, looking sharply at her, looking away, bringing his gaze back again.

"That's a consideration, is it?" he asked coldly.

"Not with me!" she hastened to say, distressed. "But everyone—my grandmother, in her letter—and Mrs. Graham."

"Your grandmother, my dear, belongs to a totally different generation," Jerome said, with his kind, patient air. "As for old Mrs. Graham, I never did like that woman! I should pay not the slightest attention to her."

Jane laughed, a rueful little laugh that was more eloquent than words. The man stood looking at her, considering.

"You think . . . eh?" Jerome asked, discontentedly, after a pause. "Oh, my God, what utter rot!" he broke off to say impatiently.

"I know," said Jane.

"But look here," Jerome said alarmedly, after a further pause for thought, "what the deuce do they propose we *do?*"

"Put Carol in a boarding school," Jane offered.

The man visibly winced.

"She's not yet five years old, the poor little woman!"

he said pitifully. "My girl, who likes to go down to the shore with her daddy . . ."

"Well, you could get a woman here, maybe," Jane suggested uncertainly. "Somebody older—married."

Jerome sat down with some violence, looking at her haggardly.

"If you could have seen them! We tried them out before you came," he said despairingly. "Every woman over fifty in this state, who couldn't make a success of anything else, had to come down here! Elsie and I almost went mad with them."

Suddenly he bent over and buried his head in his hands.

"My God—haven't I had enough—haven't I had enough!" she heard him mutter. She stood still, pity and perplexity struggling together in her heart.

"Well, I don't mind it," she said dubiously. "But they all seem to feel——It was only the day after Mrs. Delafield's funeral that Mrs. Graham talked to me about it."

"Damn such interfering old busybodies!" Jerome said. And Jane laughed briefly and mirthlessly again.

"Carol could board with you, at your grandmother's," he said suddenly.

"Well, I thought of that," Jane said. "But it's an old-fashioned, quiet atmosphere for a child. It might be better to have her with other children."

"What will you do?" Jerome demanded, after dissatisfied and frowning reflection.

She smiled philosophically, a little sadly.

"Get a position, I guess." And then abruptly she added, "What will *you* do?"

"Stay here," Jerome said.

Jane looked up at the house, and about the terrace, and down toward the sea.

"Oh, but it's so lonely," she said involuntarily.

"Yes, it's lonely," Jerome agreed briefly.

He stood staring toward the water for a minute, and then walked away. Jane saw him turn toward Bowers Hill; she and Carol went on with their play. The child was quite content with Jane, and had seemed to feel no change in her life. She and Jane had played together, down on the shore, during the long day of her mother's funeral, and had cooked their luncheon there, and Carol, sandy and weary and sweet, had flung herself into her father's arms, when he came home that night, with no thoughts in her small head but to share the glories of her wonderful day.

She was always happy with Jane; to break up the establishment seemed, as Jane said to herself a hundred times in the next few weeks, such a waste—such a cruel pity!

Jerome was very silent. He sent for a school circular, and tossed it to her, and Jane read it with an aching heart. Two white uniforms, six white blouses, one pair of gym shoes. Poor little Carol!

The "Minims Camp, Humming Bird Lodge," as the circulars called it, was already opened; little Carol could join them at once, meeting her future schoolfellows immediately. Laura Cross, who signed the letter confirming the arrangements, with the word "Miss" in brackets before her name, regretted that she could not permit the little girl's governess to spend the first few days or week in camp with her, as Mr. Delafield had suggested, as that was strictly against the rule. But all their little girls were very happy, wrote Laura Cross, and Carol would be too busy and too content to miss anybody or to be homesick.

Jane and Jerome accepted this decision with the philosophy of those who know no choice, and Jane

showed Carol the pictures of the jolly little girls swimming and cooking.

"And here's your tent, Carol, see? They call it Humming Bird Lodge."

"An' where will you sleep, Janey?" Carol, with that fatal instinct of the child approaching a parting, had never seemed so small, so sweet, so affectionate and confiding as during these last terrible days at Storm House. She was, after all, a very little creature—she had never been a strong or boisterous child—and at five she had not shed all her baby endearments, her love of being cuddled, her liking for kisses, when she and her white bear and her Raggedy Anne were tucked into bed together at night.

"Well, you see I have to go and see Granny!" Jane said brilliantly. "What would my poor old granny do if I didn't ever come and see her?"

"I could go see her, too," suggested Carol, clinging tight.

"Well, of course you could, and I hope you will, darling! Daddy and I were just talking about Thanksgiving holidays; you will have to come to me for those," Jane said cheerfully. "But this camp is just for little punkins your size. I wouldn't fit into the beds, you know—my legs would dangle out at the bottom."

Carol placed a small finger tip upon the figure of a woman in one of the photographs of the school.

"*She* could go home, and you could sleep in her bed!" she suggested hopefully.

"Well," said Jane, "I certainly am coming to see you little humming birds in your camp, and I'll find you swimming and riding horses and cooking and making fires, and we'll have more *fun!*"

Carol rested her face thoughtfully against Jane's, their cheekbones touching.

"I would always be good if you were there, Janey," the child said, in a delicious essence of her usual clear little voice. "I wish we could all live at Storm House, and you take care of me, and then I would never be sad!" she said thoughtfully.

And when she said things like this Jane's heart was wrung with an exquisite love and pain, inextricably blended, and she felt as if she were brutally betraying this innocent, trusting little creature as well as breaking her own and Jerome's heart.

The last night came, with the child's little clothes neatly laid on a chair for the next day's trip, and the child herself irresistibly engaging and gay, jumping about in her little pajamas, bestowing her most fascinating butterfly kisses upon Jane and her father. Jerome sat in the nursery with her until she was asleep; after that Jane did not know what he did. He disappeared, to ease his misery perhaps by walking alone on the shore and looking out upon the summer sea.

She never cared to remember the next morning, its strangeness and sadness, its taste of change and farewell. Somehow trunks were strapped and suitcases closed, somehow she said good-bye to Hong and Fah, somehow she and Jerome and Carol found themselves in the train, moving toward the north, toward the city.

It was all like a horrible dream: Jerome's haggard quiet, Carol's growing uneasiness, the meeting with Miss Younger at the ferry, and Miss Younger's taking kind but firm possession of Carol's hand as she told Jane enthusiastically that dear Miss Cross was a perfect genius with children—all the babies loved her.

Carol cried alarmedly at the end, not-quite-five-year-old Carol, who had lost her mother less than a month ago, and Jane went home feeling like a murderer. Jerome had put an envelope into her hand at parting, and

had tried to say something. She had been conscious that his eyes were brimming with tears.

"This may not be the right solution," she had faltered. "If it isn't, we'll simply have to make a change! You will let me know how things go with her, won't you? And if there's anything—*ever!* You know you seem like my family."

She was crying now, crying like a big baby down here at the busy ferry. She was crying because the touch of Carol's warm, anxious little hand was still on her own; crying because Jerome, big and gentle and bewildered and helpless, looked so forlorn, in his black clothes, as he turned away.

CHAPTER VI

THE emptiness, the futility of the world, when he was gone! Jane walked to the Valencia Street car, and sat outside, in front, close to the motorman. After a while she took out the envelope Jerome had given her; he had doubled her month's pay—and there was a note. It started her tears again to read it, and she had to put it away.

The frightful sense of blankness and emptiness continued. The streets looked uninteresting, unimportant. There were chaff and old papers and street dust blowing against the cottage bulkhead when she reached her grandmother's corner; Aunt San, who was spry and wiry and energetic, often swept that whole big sidewalk in the morning, but it was no use. The inescapable summer wind, that "trade wind" to whose mysterious benefits Jane had often heard her uncles pay tribute, always blew the rubbish back again in the afternoon.

The steps that led up through the bulkhead to the garden were wood, weatherbeaten but whole; there were nicely kept fuchsias and nasturtiums and roses and marigolds in the garden, heliotrope was plastroned under the bay windows with strips of kid, and under the faucet the water had made a little pool where birds, as usual, were drinking. Grandma's treasured Lady Washington geraniums, delicately frilled petals of pink and scarlet and white bound up into a stout bush with a strip of cheesecloth, were swaying in the violent wind.

Between the two white bay windows that were neatly looped with clean curtains there was a front door with an old silver doorplate upon it. But few ever used the front door; the members of the family never did.

Jane went around a curved path close to the house and through a gate in a fence. The fence was of wood, with a criss-crossed lath extension on top, and the gate, too, was all of criss-crossed laths neatly bound and painted white. Behind the gate was a back yard where chickens had picked the ground bare beneath willow trees, and where chicken feathers blew idly about among a nest of little sheds and outhouses. At the back of the house an open porch rose four steps above the yard; two or three adventurous hens descended from it with agitated squawks as Jane went up the steps and into the kitchen.

Her grandmother was baking and had her head tied in a spotless towel. She had a round, soft, pursy face full of little puffs and folds, good teeth, sharp eyes, and a rounded rather than fat little body.

"Well, if it don't seem good to have our girl home again!" she said, holding her floury hands well away from Jane's tailored suit. "Your Aunt San ain't home yet, but she's just as pleased as Punch to have you back, an' you'll find Granpa an' Uncle Peter playin' checkers in there. Change your good dress, an' then come back an' tell me all about ever'thing," directed Mrs. Pettibone.

"Pies!" said Jane, trying for the old enthusiasm.

"Pies! You ain't lost your sweet tooth, I can see that," her grandmother said delightedly. She was too much absorbed in her cooking to notice the older expression on the girl's face, or the droop to the young shoulders as she turned away.

Jane went into a small, orderly dining room with a

sewing machine and canaries in it, an apartment streaming with afternoon sun and scented with apples, carpet, and furniture polish. Two old men were playing checkers. She kissed them both; Grandfather, who was fat and round and small and smelled of rubber, and Uncle Peter, who was small and wiry and smelled of his old pipe.

She had to sleep in Aunt San's room when she was at home; there were only three bedrooms in the cottage. Three bedrooms down the southeast side, with a bathroom at the end of the hall, and three other rooms down the northwest side: parlour, dining room, and kitchen.

The bedroom was full of odd lights this afternoon as the wind bellied the roller shade and sent waves of gloom or sudden illuminations over the old mud and chocolate and orange paper. The mirror gave back these lights drearily; Aunt San's clock ticked reproachfully, menacingly, in the ordered silence.

Aunt San had a large pine bureau, painted brown and decorated with dots and dashes in mill work; there was a stain on top where Jane had spilled the hair tonic years ago, a pin cushion representing a tomato, and a mauve satin box on which roses were painted to encircle the embroidered word "Hankerchiefs." Jane could still remember the awful moment in which she had drawn Aunt San's attention to the mistake in spelling, for it seemed that Aunt Minny had made this box, and Aunt Minny was dead. Aunt Minny had also done the wall panel in wine-coloured satin, with bells and ribbons on it, and the legend, "May Christmas find no joy-bell mute," and there was a mistake in that, too. But that Jane had never dared to mention.

Jane stood in the middle of the room, looking about her, and sighed. The wind rustled lilac leaves harshly

together outside the window, and the light, looming high as the curtain ballooned into the room, showed with merciless clearness every detail of the remembered plainness, and poorness, and ugliness, and scrupulous neatness.

"San!" she heard her grandmother call as she stood motionless, "get them towels off my line, as you come in, will you?" And then, "Yes, she's here—an' she looks real well! She's gettin' out of her good dress!"

Jane listened with a sort of consternation; she had forgotten quite how lowly they were even though she had always known they were plain folk, these old persons who had been all her world until a few years ago. As a baby she had felt the difference between herself and them, had heard their speech as a contrast, and never as a part of her own.

For Jane's mother had been with her then, that widowed, fiery little mother, who was so desperately determined to win for her child more than she had ever had herself. She had graduated from college, Jane's mother, and she spoke French and played the piano; Jane could remember the hunger with which her mother displayed her education when she was talking to a stranger, how eager she always was to explain that she and her child did not belong to the world in which they found themselves.

"I mean to take her abroad as soon as I can manage it," little Mrs. Cassell, entirely without prospects or means, would say gallantly. "Those galleries in Florence—dear me! we ought all to know them. I tell my mother," she would say, "that we must look for something more modern, among those new apartments over on Sacramento Street!"

Jane, as a girl, had listened to her, a little proud, a little fearful and ashamed, more than a little pitiful.

Mother's dissatisfaction with what she had, with shabbiness and mediocrity and poverty, with grammatical lapses and "commonness," had kept the little cottage in an uproar for the first fifteen years of Jane's life. Then Sarah Cassell had died, and the old people could drink their tea from their saucers, drop their "g's," and pad about the neighbourhood in gingham aprons and carpet slippers if they felt so disposed.

But the distinction, the ineradicable difference between themselves and the girl who was not even of the next generation, but the one beyond that, remained. Jane was a lady. And bitterly, insufferably, she felt the chasm between herself and her own people to-night.

Her uncles, because the night was warm, came comfortably to the table in their shirt sleeves. Her grandmother, holding her teacup in both hands, rested both elbows on the table and laughed a good deal at everything, crinkling up her fat, soft, bunchy little old face. Aunt San, a trifle superior, a little removed from the others by reason of being a retired school teacher, was almost the worst of the lot.

"I often wonder where they get their ideas for their books!" said Aunt San of Jerome Delafield. "I was reading a piece in the paper the other night, and s'I to your grandmother, 'Where d'ye s'pose they think all that up?'"

"You are like a lot of nice, contented old sea-cows blundering about together!" Jane said in her soul. Uncle Joe was especially like a sea-cow, somehow, with his round, blunt head perfectly bald, his eyes bulging and interested and puzzled, and his little subdued grunts and mutters over his food.

They dined in the kitchen. The dining room had been used for years as a sort of game room. All the old persons were animatedly fond of games.

Uncle Peter and Grandpa always played checkers from the time Grandpa got home from the rubber factory, where he was—by an odd coincidence—listed as a "checker" himself, until supper. Grandma and Aunt San always did the cross-word puzzle in the evening paper, and others not too complicated in magazines here and there, and they were never so excited or happy as when a big book puzzle contest or other enigma was started by one of the daily journals to keep them occupied for weeks.

One paper occasionally had a picture of several scores of objects, all beginning with "s" or "c," and Aunt San and Grandma kept copies of the little ink sketch before their eyes during all their waking hours. Jane could still remember their enthusiasm when once, in her childhood, a whole newspaper page had been pied, in utterly unrelated and confusing lines, for untangling, and when Aunt San, as "Mrs. Anna Greenway, of 2192 San José Avenue," had actually won the first prize of ten dollars.

Not but that Aunt San and Grandma were used to prizes. They were always entering chocolate cakes and evenly browned loaves of bread in Mechanics Fairs and Industrial Exhibits and Progress Clubs, and whenever they did they came home with blue ribbons. Grandma—again unfamiliar as "Mrs. Henry Pettibone"—had even had her picture in the paper.

After supper the old women washed the dishes, talking interminably and interestedly, and Uncle Joe and Uncle Peter played cribbage. Each put a five-cent piece on the table upon commencing, and that particular uncle who had to produce more than three or four more coins during the evening grew nervous and ill-tempered, and sometimes even openly suspected his opponent of foul play.

Grandpa drifted happily about, sometimes watching them with shrewd chuckles, satisfied that he had kept out of the hazard, placing disks on the Victrola, listening to them attentively, and setting up the green table by the fireplace, with the two worn packs of cards ready for "Lou and San." The women, coming in with warm, soaked, clean, lemon-scented hands, would exclaim appreciatively at his thoughtfulness.

Sometimes an uncle was borrowed for a game of whist, but more often Grandma and Aunt San played solitaire, and Grandpa watched, sipping meanwhile his hot malted milk—for Grandpa had gotten a terrible cold at the time of the McKinley-Bryan gold and silver fight, and a doctor had recommended this warm, soothing night draught at that time. Grandma was convinced that but for his malted milk he would have died ten times over.

He was the oldest of them all, nearly seventy, but he was not failing by any means. He loved to watch the solitaire, and would chuckle when a play was overlooked.

"Got some good reason you ain't playin' your red five, Lou?"

"Oh, my gracious goodness, ain't I dumb!" Grandma would exclaim, her plump, pudgy little hand snatching at the card as if to blot out her shame as fast as possible.

Just before ten all the old men went to bed, but the old women often remained beside the fire for another hour, shifting their cards, yawning, talking, talking, talking. Their lives, after thirty years in this old cottage, were rich with neighbourhood associations and interests; the very seasons supplied them with material. It was always necessary to know that asparagus was on the market again, or that all the fish merchants agreed that there never had been such a scarcity of crabs.

To-night, environed by their contented commonplaceness, Jane felt almost mad with restlessness and homesickness. She could settle to nothing, a suffocating sense of the pettiness, the stupidness of the whole home atmosphere drove her from one thing to another like a tortured spirit.

The vision of little Carol was constantly with her. She physically missed the child's nearness and the happy responsibility that had been hers for almost a year. Carol's supper—Carol's bedtime—Carol's prayers—the absence of all these left great blanks in her time and in her heart. They would be coming up from the shore now, if she and Carol were at "home." . . . They would get a whiff of Hong's baking as they passed the kitchen yard. . . .

She dared not think of it. The ugly, clumsy house, with the queer, greenish gray sea lights flickering over it, and the gulls crying around the pepper trees. . . .

And Jerome Delafield, big and quiet and loosely built—the sort of man life can torture because he is so helpless under torture—Jerome coming down from his workshop on the slope of Bowers Hill, dizzy and cold and silent with weariness, but perhaps with a slim book of poetry in his pocket from which he would read to his women-folk after a while, when he had had his meal, his pipe, and his rest. Carol would climb into his lap, her little fair head resting luxuriously against his breast, her two small hands curled tightly about his thumbs.

It was impossible not to remember Elsie, too; complacent, superior Elsie, who had somehow dragged Jerome back from the very deeps of despair, who had triumphantly established his health and his reputation, who had brought forth, from her own chronic invalidism and helplessness, Carol, the child who was all the world,

who meant all poetry and content and joy, to Jerome Delafield.

"Oh, there must be some better way for us all than this!" Jane reflected in her aching heart.

Her way, for the moment, however, was only too clear. She must be happy; she set her face resolutely toward happiness.

When her Aunt San looked up, while shuffling cards in dry, veiny little hands, to ask what her plans were, she answered readily and cheerfully:

"Well, I've got to do some pressing, and I thought I'd have my hair clipped, and look up Dorothy, and telephone Marge."

But it didn't sound interesting, even in the words. And on the following day it somehow all fell flat: Marge's enthusiasm and her warm invitation to a card party, Dorothy's ecstasies over the real estate agent to whom she had just announced her engagement, Miss Porter's kindly welcome at the library, her intelligent help about filing an application for a position. Jane had her hair clipped, and walked the familiar streets in familiar mellow morning sunshine, and came home for luncheon just as the inevitable "trade winds" were getting under way. She sent Carol a little wooden box of sugar oranges and a loving note, largely printed. Her heart gave a sick twist at the thought of the child's helplessness; how could a five-year-old signal for help if she needed it?

"Goin' to the card party, dear?"

"Thinking about it, Grandma."

"The girls 're raisin' quite a sum for their club," said her grandmother, grating carrots busily. "Marge an' young Snow was goin' together some. Marge was tellin' your Aunt San that her mother felt terrible, her goin' with an undertaker. 'Well,' San says, 'she may not want you to marry one, but,' s'says, 'it'll

be a bad day for all of us when *they* quit business!'"

Jane smiled automatically. She felt in every fibre of her body the wild rebellious springing of muscles caught in a trap. She *would* get out! She *must* get out.

"These carrots is for torrac salad," her grandmother was saying with her plump little chuckly laughter. "You'd die if I told you about my torrac salad. Your grandfather an' your uncles wouldn't touch carrots; Grandpa said they was horse food, an' both your uncles said they didn't have no taste. Well, I stewed 'em an' I baked 'em, an' 'twasn't the slightest mite of use—carrots they wouldn't eat. So one night I grated 'em, an' I put raisins in with them, and dressed 'em real good with French dressin', an' s'I to your Aunt San, 'I b'lieve if I could once get the boys to eat these, they'd like 'em!' 'Well,' she says, 'you tell 'em it's a tropic fruit that you buy in bottles, an' call it torrac,' she says, 'that's carrot backward.' So that night I done like I said . . ."

Jane waited until the point was more than clear, and laughed. She took a broom straw, as directed, and opened the oven, and thrust the straw into a sponge cake. The sponge cake was for the card party.

She wore the evening dress that Sylvia Bellamy had given her, and went to the card party. It was at Dora Reynolds's house, a large, important-looking house in Dolores Street. There were fifteen tables; it was a real social and financial success. Sixty persons. Imagine! There was sixty dollars to start off with, the girls of the club kept saying exultantly.

All their common little heads were bobbed and curled, they all wore silver slippers and spangled tube dresses, and there was much loud laughter and teasing. Most of them played bridge, but the two boys at Jane's table knew the game so little that after a rubber or two

they began to show card tricks and deal poker hands. Eventually they took dice out, and the girls gambled a little timidly with them, asking ridiculous questions. Dummies from other tables watched the game, grinning from the side lines.

When she had been a member of this group a year ago Jane had been troubled by her own awkwardness and shyness; she had been one of those "nice" girls who are adored by their own sex and are most amusing and popular with it, but who suffer from stiffness and awkwardness with young males. But she had supposed that her baptism of fire with Garth Bellamy last autumn had cured her of that. She had supposed she never could be ill at ease with these south-of-Market-Street boys again! And yet to-night the old stiffness of muscles came back.

When they were having fruit punch and sponge cake at midnight she made herself say carelessly to the boy with whom she was sitting:

"Will you walk home with me? I'm only three blocks away, and I ought to be getting home."

The boy flushed nicely.

"Oh, I'm sorry, but I brought Jean Hammond," he stammered. "And I ought to——"

"Oh, that's all right!" Jane said, despising him and despising herself, once more relegated to the position of the "nice" girl who was respected by all the boys but aroused interest in none. The young Daytons took her home; Dr. George Dayton and his bride, who had been Lucy Treanor.

She didn't mind. She wouldn't have married the finest of them, the most prosperous, the handsomest, the richest! A lot of tiresome, half-developed morons!

But it was all very flat. It was flat waking in a soft, warm fog the next day, telling her grandmother and

aunt about the card party, in the kitchen, assuring them that the cake had been perfect, even if it had been iced while still a little warm.

Rose Richard telephoned. They were having a bathroom shower for Dorothy, and Jane simply must come.

"I'm counting on you for something *killing*," said Rose. "Will you ever forget when you brought the ladybugs to Lucy's garden shower!"

"I might bring a leak," Jane said dully. Rose shrieked. "Oh, wait till I yell that to Mama!"

Dull. Dull. Oh, she was so horribly bored. Miss Porter's brother, the real estate man, telephoned in the late afternoon. They were rushed to death with this new Dollar-a-Day-Doll's-House development; had she ever thought of being one of those agents who display properties? Could she come in right away and ask for Mr. Moore? To-day? Well, to-morrow then. And ask for Mr. Moore. Wait a minute—— Mr. Moore mightn't be there to-morrow. Ask for Mr. Moore or Mr. Joe Porter.

Jane repeated the names and the address as earnestly as if she meant to pay some further attention to them.

The days went on, went on. She grudged every instant of the widening time that shut her from Storm House.

Ten days. Eleven days. She had walked slowly, thoughtfully home from market, on the afternoon of the twelfth day, when her grandmother met her at the kitchen door.

"There was a wire 'phoned in for you, deary. I copied it out there on that bag."

It was pencilled indeed on a flattened bakery bag; the pencil had slipped on the greasy spots.

It was signed "Laura Cross," and read: "Carol ill.

Nothing alarming, have failed to get in touch with father. Kindly advise him. Will report regularly."

"I'll have to go, Granny!"

"Oh, deary, no! Why, it's way up on the Nevada border, isn't it?"

"That doesn't matter! Oh," said Jane, with a wild pirouette. "Oh, Granny, she needs me! Oh, I'm so glad—— No, I don't mean that, but it's such a relief. It'll be——"

She began madly to pack, rushed from telephone to bureau, tore off her shoes.

"It says, 'get in touch with her father,' dear."

"I know! Poor fellow, he'll be almost mad. But I can't wait for that, Granny. She might die. She's just lost her mother, poor scrap! I've got to get that six o'clock. I'll be there at ten to-morrow."

Life and hope and terror and love had poured back into her being. She rushed out to a waiting taxicab with only one last exultant kiss for the bewildered old woman she left behind her.

Jane hardly slept in her lower berth that night, and presented herself, at the camp, at an early hour the next morning. Carol, in the infirmary tent, was placidly asleep, and Miss Cross had gone away. Miss Beaver would have to telephone Miss Cross about letting Miss Cassell see the sick child. In the case of a mother it was different, but just a friend—— They had to be so careful of infections.

While Miss Beaver telephoned Miss Cross Jane watched a pretty fourteen-year-old, in a bluejacket's blouse and bloomers, tacking a typewritten sheet to a bulletin board in a very capable way. A much smaller girl timidly questioned her, and the big girl said definitely, but not unkindly:

"You can find all that out from your squad leader.

You are not supposed to speak to the seniors!"

Miss Beaver came back to say somewhat discontentedly that certainly Miss Cassell could see Carol, since she had come so far to see the child, but another time would she please remember that the camp had a regular monthly visiting day, and would she please come then? And Miss Beaver was to remind Miss Cassell that the train to the city went back at one o'clock; unfortunately, there was a very strict rule about having guests in camp.

"Is there a hotel—a boarding house—around here anywhere?" Jane asked, daunted but determined.

No, there wasn't. But Miss Cassell could return to the city quite reassured. It was only a little cold and fever, and everything in the world was being done for Carol.

Jane went into the clean, sweet, warm, pine-scented tent and sat down beside the bed.

"I wouldn't touch her!" said the nurse quickly. But Jane did not move her fingers from the hot, limp little hand.

She looked away, pondering, pondering, looked down, and saw that Carol was watching her with beautiful, reproachful, sunken brown eyes.

"Jane, you din answer my letters!" Carol's tired little voice said instantly. "I tole you an' tole you to come get me, an' you din come." Jane's eyes instantly were brimming.

"Perhaps the postman couldn't read them, my dearest," she said, gently, as if she were afraid sound might break the child.

"They *said* he could!" Carol answered.

"I'd not answer her. I'd just let her rest," said the hovering nurse.

Carol shut her eyes, not to open them until the nurse

had stepped out of the room. Then she said, with a fearful, cautious look about, that made Jane's heart sick:

"Is my father here?"

"He's coming," Jane said tenderly, her heart sinking.

"To-day?"

"Or to-morrow, darling."

"But, Jane," Carol said, alarmed, "I'm going home to-day?"

A wider meaning behind the words struck Jane with a deadly chill. Her thoughts rushed about like small animals wild in a trap. No hotel, no offer of a bed, no way of getting in touch with authority—which was Jerome—and this eager, hot little hand clutching hers with all the desperation of frightened and homesick babyhood.

"Take me home, won't you, Janey?"

"My darling, of course I will!"

Carol dozed, and Jane questioned the nurse.

"*Could* she be moved?"

"Oh, absolutely not! The rules don't permit it without the doctor's permission, anyway. And she's going to be all right," the nurse said comfortably.

"I'll have to slip away while she's asleep, poor darling," Jane mused. "Oh, my God, what shall I do? How can I leave her! What will he think if I do?"

At a few minutes before twelve the nurse said, "Would you like a lunch tray?" And she answered her own question, suggestively, by adding, "There's a diner on your train."

"Oh, no, thank you," Jane said. Carol's fingers gripped hers tightly, determinedly.

"You don't have to leave until half-past twelve," said the nurse. "And I believe I'll slip over and hear the girls' programme," she added. "This is our monthly music programme, in the refectory, and they have ice

cream and make quite a party of it. That handsome girl, Ursula Coleman, is the chairwoman!"

"That's all right," Jane said, nodding. "I'll be here!"

"I'll bring this girlie some chopped ice. That's all our doctor will let us have to-day," the nurse said, departing. Jane sat on, holding Carol's hand, staring into space.

She could hear faint music, and faint laughing, and faint clapping from the refectory, out of sight among the trees, in the hot midday silence of the woods. The taxi rattled up.

A sudden determination came into the girl's eyes.

"I can only fail," she said aloud, "and if I fail I'll miss the train, and they'll *have* to put me up! Two hundred miles. I can't put two hundred miles between Carol and me to-night."

She went down and talked to the driver, who was at first unresponsive and unencouraging. Jane showed him a ten-dollar bill, at which he brightened faintly, instantly forming his alibi.

"I *always* drive off sharp. It ain't *my* business who's in the car," he said, even as he would say it to Miss Cross later on.

Trembling as if she were committing a particularly unsuccessful murder, Jane put Carol's slippers on her, wrapped the kimono and coat about the small, suddenly perspiring form, picked her up bodily.

"Carol, you and I are going to run away!" she said breathlessly.

"What would they do if they catched us, Janey?"

"I don't know, darling. But they won't catch us!"

The girl's heart was beating madly. Folding a light blanket about the child, wrappers and all, she climbed quietly into the back seat of the car, and instantly they were off. The camp was quiet, deserted. Laughter and

clapping came again, in faint gusts, from the direction of the refectory.

The climbing lines of redwoods, the valley floors plated with blue water, went by them. Jane dressed Carol in her stockings and shoes, her little organdy gown, her light coat and hat. She folded the wraps neatly.

"We don't want them to think a little sick girl is getting on the train," she said, "and put us off!"

The child's weakness and emotion frightened her. Suppose Carol died of exposure, exhaustion, coal dust, and train air? Jane kept the blanket about her, anxiously watching the road behind them. Suppose they were followed?

"Miss Cross is comin' down on this train," the driver said, appallingly. "You din't want to see her, did ye?"

"See her!" Jane turned pale. "*She'll* see *us!*" she gasped.

"Wall, no, I's thinkin' of that," said the resourceful driver. "She sets in the chair car, way back, so's she can git out right where my stand is. I'll drop ye up toward the front, so's you can git into a day coach."

It sounded possible. But Jane knew all the fugitive's terrors as they stood for endless minutes on the station platform waiting for the big overland train to thunder in, sick with fear that Miss Cross might choose the day coach on the particular occasion, might step down right into their arms.

Her agonized eyes following the oncoming rush of the mountain of iron and steel, she guided Carol; a coloured man helped them up to the high step.

"Chair car, lady?"

"Well, unless you have an empty drawing room?"

"Get in here," he said. "I'll fix you up."

She and Carol were seated in a day coach. Jane looked

out of the window. The camp taxi had started on its nine-mile drive again, with an upright woman in gray on the back seat.

The drawing room was on the shady side of the train, and the clean, smooth bed into which Carol was lowered looked deliciously restful. Jane ordered ice and orange juice and watched the child anxiously as the green miles rattled by. Carol was animated, enchanted.

"I'm going to sleep, truly, and I'm going to get well so fast that I can feed those chickens at your grandma's, and won't they be so*prised?*" babbled Carol feverishly.

Jane kept her fingers on the small wrist.

"Everybody's going to be surprised!" she said drily.

They got home at nine o'clock, and Carol fell deep asleep in Jane's bed. Grandma put experienced old fingers into the neck of her nightgown.

"Drippin'!" she said. "She'll do." And for once Jane did not think Grandma either ungrammatical or inelegant.

It was in the middle of the next morning that Jerome Delafield came haggard and frantic to the almost unused front door, and Jane in her blue kitchen apron met him there, and caught his hands, and drew him in.

"Jane—she's sick!" he said. "And I can't start for that damned place until six to-night! I got the woman's wire at midnight. I've been driving ever since."

"You've driven from Storm House? A hundred and eighty miles!"

"I didn't notice it. Jane——"

"Come in," Jane said, in the quieting tone she had heard Elsie use to him sometimes. "Come in and sit down. She's here."

"If anything ever happened to her——" he was muttering. He interrupted himself. "Who?" he asked.

"Come in! Carol's here," Jane repeated.

"Carol!"

"Yes, she's here."

"They brought her here!"

"No, I did. I went up and got her."

"She's——"

"Not very sick. She has a little fever, and an upset stomach, and she was homesick."

"Homesick! That baby! Well, she's never going away from me again," Jerome said desperately.

"No, I don't think she ought to."

"But you got her!"

"I went up yesterday. I kidnapped her. She's asleep now, and she's all right," said Jane, "and I've told her she's not going back. I said she'd always be with me. She's right in there—asleep."

"Oh, my God, my God, my God!" he whispered, on a long sobbing breath. And he put his arms about her and dropped his head on her shoulder. Jane tightened her own small arms about him maternally, a strange light coming into her eyes.

Carol did not feed the chickens that day, nor the next, but the time came when she did go out, important and thrilled, with "Grammer" to scatter their corn, chattering like a little parrot herself as she went. For Carrol was never, never, never going back to the Humming Bird Lodge, and her Jane was going to have her always, always, always!

At about this time Jerome Delafield, who had been staying at a hotel in the city, came out to the cottage on San José Avenue and walked with Jane in the garden. The noon whistles, Jane remembered afterward, were shrilling down on Market Street and in the factory district when she and Jerome walked among the Lady Washingtons and the fuchsia bushes and talked.

"Have you thought about what I wrote you, Jane?" Jerome said.

"Yes," she answered with a little effort, and without looking at him, "I have."

"And what did you think about it, my dear?"

A short silence. Then she stopped, close to the white-washed fence, in the shelter of the big snowball bush.

"I should—like it," she said thickly.

"There was only one point," Jerome said, smiling eagerly as he took her hands in his. "I wanted to say this. In my letter I'm afraid I may have dwelt too much on the advantages to you, Jane. I didn't mean to do that."

She gave her abrupt, boyish little laugh; her cheeks were red.

"They're there, those advantages," she said briefly. "You *are* a recognized writer—you *are* rich—you *do* give me position and security and comfort."

"And affection. And gratitude," he added, as she halted, on an odd note that was almost like pain.

"And I have nothing!" Jane said, suddenly scowling.

"That's just what I want to say," Jerome contradicted her. "You have everything. I'm almost twice your age, I'm a man who has been through every bitterness life can know. I question my right—I very much question my right to offer you anything less than—than everything!"

Jane was looking down, her fingers torturing a marguerite bush.

"How do you mean, 'less than everything'?"

"You know what I mean," Jerome said, earnestly trying to be fair. "In the sense most persons use it, I have never been in love," he said. "I never will be! But if affection, and devotion——"

"How do you mean, you never have been in love?"

Jane, suddenly the older of the two, asked, looking up squarely, her face paling.

"Because I have never—well, experienced what you experienced, from the instant you met Garth Bellamy," he said hesitatingly.

The colour rushed back into her small, stern face, and she laughed.

"That wasn't love!" she said scornfully. "That was just learning *how!*"

"Then I've never learned how," Jerome said. "But if ever a man was grateful to a woman, I'll be grateful to you, Jane," he said humbly. "My home, my work, my little girl—no," he corrected it smilingly, "my two little girls—I'll owe it all to you. If you could know the happiness it gives me, just to think of it! Why, I'll never want to go anywhere—to do anything but just live on at Storm House," he said. "Some day you and Carol will have to see New York, and Paris, and everything you want to see, but for a while now just to know that you're *there*, and she's there, and we can go back to our old life . . ."

There was a pause. Then Jane said stubbornly, unhappily, "Garth Bellamy means no more to me now than a *name!*"

"I'm glad of it!" Jerome said. "For I don't want anything to trouble you, dear. I want you to be as happy as I am going to be!" he added, a little wistfully. "I've been thinking all these weeks of what a companion—what a friend—you've been to me!"

She was silent for a minute, looked up, her brow thoughtful.

"It could be secret, couldn't it, Mr. Delafield? On account of——"

"Of Elsie," he said, nodding. "Only your people would know at first. We could write Sylvia—a few other

members of the family. You and I and Carol have only to drive to Santa Lolita. The courthouse is there, with a church right opposite. I don't believe that the marriage of John Jerome Delafield—John J., it could be—and Jane Cassell——"

"I could make it Mary J. Cassell. That's my real name!" she said, entertained by the idea.

"I don't believe ten persons would see it, or identify us if they did," he said.

Again Jane considered, her thick boyish eyebrows drawn close together.

"It would make me very happy, Mr. Delafield," she said simply, then, looking up at him.

"And it would make me very happy, Jane," he said gravely.

"You know you are the—the most distinguished person I know," she said. "You don't——" The movement of her head indicated the cottage. "You don't belong in this sort of family!" she reminded him.

"That's entirely your imagination," Jerome said. "But if there is the slightest balance in my favour there," he added, "it still means that I shall always owe you a tremendous—tremendous debt! Come on, now. Shall we go tell Carol, and—and Grandma?"

She put her hand in his, and they went through the gate in the whitewashed fence together.

"I've taken Elsie's apartment downstairs," Jerome told her as they walked along. "You and Carol can make what arrangements you like above. You told me yesterday that you liked me, Jane," he said very simply. "My dear, you haven't any idea how much you're going to like me!"

The girl gave him an odd, speculative look.

"I rather—think I—have!" she said with her brief cryptic laugh as she opened the kitchen door.

CHAPTER VII

"WHAT do you want for your birthday, a week from to-day, Jane?"

Jane looked up from the floor, her eyes widening with surprise.

"Oh, so it is!" she said, childishly concerned. "I'd forgotten it!"

"You can have anything you want," Jerome said, taking off his reading glasses, closing the slim volume he had been reading aloud, and smiling down at her as she crouched beside the fire on the hearth rug.

She smiled back, hugged her knees, tossed her head to keep the soft mop of brown hair out of her eyes.

"But I don't want anything, as it happens," she announced.

"Everybody wants something in this world," Jerome said thoughtfully.

"All right then, Jerry. What do *you* want?" Jane demanded triumphantly, in return.

He narrowed his kindly gray eyes into a laugh, and shook his head.

"Ah, my dear," he said, with a change of tone and with an infinitely loving glance at her small, sturdy, red-cheeked little figure, scrambled, in its brief velvet frock, upon the fireside cushion, "I'm only too rich! Crœsus himself couldn't buy me anything. I wouldn't cross the room to make terms with—with the Count of Monte Cristo."

Jane studied him a minute in satisfaction, her youth-

ful blue eyes alertly compassing his long stretched form in the big chair, his old corduroy smoking jacket, his fine hand laxly holding the little red leather Shakespeare, his head, with its disorderly waves of yellow brown, resting against the back of the chair.

"That's the way it ought to be!" she said contentedly.

"My only feeling," Jerome said, with closed eyes, "is that life has been too kind to me, one hundred million times too kind! There isn't a day," he went on in a low tone, as if he were thinking aloud, "there isn't a day of my life that I don't—well, I was going to say, that I don't thank God for it!" he ended, opening his eyes to smile at her.

"Let it stand," Jane said with her own peculiar boyish brevity and bluntness. "You can thank a person, even if you don't believe in Him!"

"I do," Jerome assured her seriously. "Out of all the world," he went on, "when I was battered and broken and half mad, I had to be the man to find this place, beside the ocean, with an old Chinese cook in it, and a fig tree——"

"And Elsie," Jane supplied, conscientiously loyal.

"And Elsie! And how kind she was to me," Jerome conceded, stopping to think about it. "And then, as if that wasn't enough, to have Carol, and to begin my work, as if that wasn't *more* than enough!" he said. There was a brief silence, during which Jane moved her bright eyes from his face to the dying fire and resumed her former occupation of poking the logs. "But I never really knew what happiness was, then," Jerome said suddenly. "All my happiness was ahead!"

She did not look at him. Her voice, when she spoke, was a little thick, and held very low.

"Do you—do you really mean that, Jerry?" she asked.

"But Jane, my dearest child, *look* at us!" he said eloquently for answer.

Her eyes sought the fire, and for a long time she was silent. But in the embers indeed she saw them, the three happy occupants of Storm House. She saw the summer awakenings to bird songs and the rustle of high leaves, the twilights when they wandered hour after hour along the shore in the sunset. She heard the child's gay laughter and racing feet, heard Jerome's voice, reading to them both, heard his laugh—oftener, deeper, more joyful all the time. She heard herself arguing amusedly with Hong, heard the roar of her motor-car engine, the light bang of the kitchen's screen door. It was like childhood again, after the anxious, puzzled yearnings of her eighteenth and nineteenth and twentieth years, only it was childhood without its helplessness and fears, and with all the joys of free days, fresh linen frocks, meals youthfully augmented with stray cookies and slices of bread and applesauce, and the delicious sense of being useful, being needed, being beloved, behind it all, and under it all, and above it all. There was never a morning too long for Jane, even though the rain was falling—falling—falling on the sea and the garden. There was never an afternoon when she was not conscious of her own happiness, nor an evening when this place at Jerome's knee, beside the fire, did not seem to her a royal dais, the one desirable and enviable spot in the whole world.

He had told her many times, in her eighteen months' joyous reign at Storm House, that she was growing prettier. Jane always denied it, but she knew in her heart that it was true. How could any woman be as happy as she and not grow prettier, not glow and bloom and shine with the radiance of life?

Something of this was in her face as she looked up at him, for Jerome said affectionately:

"I don't know how you do it! Not yet twenty-two, and tied down here to a man sixteen years older——"

"A celebrity," Jane interposed.

"It wouldn't do you much good if I were!" Jerome said with a laugh. "For what good is a celebrity to anyone shut behind a mile of eucalyptus avenue?"

"Well, it attracts other celebrities to us," Jane reminded him demurely. "We don't have much company, but what we do have is—select. The Bridges, and Mary Rideout—and darling old Professor Canning. I'd rather have only them in a whole year than fifty or sixty nobodies!"

"Because you have a most extraordinary nature," said Jerome seriously. "You're a little girl, and a happy little girl, and that's the grandest thing there is in the world. A day like this, a miserable, wet, raw, beastly day," he went on, "you and Carol go off to the farm, and you rush back late, and apologetic, because you've had such a gorgeous time!"

"Well, it happened to-day," Jane explained innocently, hastily, "that Keezy's puppies——"

"Oh, I know, there's always a good reason why you should have a perfectly gorgeous time, every separate day, for some separate cause," the man interrupted her. "But that only shows what a little girl you are!"

His words, oddly enough, sobered her, and she turned back to the fire with a faint frown upon her youthful forehead.

"I'm very grown up every Thursday," she said, with a little touch of dignity. "I read papers and raise parliamentary points, and everything!"

Jerome narrowed his eyes again in an indulgent smile.

"I'd give a good deal to see you managing your club, Mrs. President!" he said lazily.

"Well, I assure you I'm good!" Jane persisted. "We have four new members, too, from Rosarias. Two lovely English ladies whose husband—or one of their husbands—is teaching at the Santa Lolita High. And Mrs. Bates, the doctor's wife, *she's* come in," Jane went on with satisfaction. "She said that she didn't want to join for years because she thought it was just a waste of time, but that when we put her on the Social Service Committee she wanted to come in."

"Very much to her credit, too!" Jerome said, enjoying himself.

"Well, I thought so!" He could see the soft, peachy fuzz on her brown, hard young cheek as Jane turned in the lamplight. "She's going to get us the Board of Health nurse from Santa Lolita," Jane went on. "She'll come over every Monday morning to weigh babies."

"Oh! Isn't it enough to weigh them once?"

"Well, *Jerome*, you have to see if they gain!" Jane said reproachfully. "Didn't you and Elsie—with Carol?"

"I think we did. I'm sure we did. But we had to have a trained nurse for her, for the first year or two, you know. Elsie couldn't handle her, and the nurse, as I remember it, took all the responsibility. My God," Jerome mused, lowering his tone, his eyes fixed on space, "she was a cute little baby!"

Jane had been smiling her own open, honest little smile. But now a faint cloud came over her face again, and she resumed her staring into the fire.

"You must be happy to get such a kick out of the funny things you do," Jerome said presently, almost wistfully.

Her bright look came up again.

"Happy! I'm the happiest person in the world," she told him.

"I have to believe that, because I see you all day long, and you show it," Jerome said. And idly, smilingly, he added, "The sensible marriage—without passion and excitement and what the books and plays call 'love,' has its points, after all, hasn't it, Jane? I don't believe Romeo and Juliet, or Aucassin and Nicolette, had much on us, do you?"

His glance found only the curve of her cheek, and a small ear buried in dark brown waves of hair. Jane did not answer.

"It seemed to me a terrible risk to take, our marrying," Jerome went on. "A risk for you—never for me!" he added, hastily. "*I* gained everything. I remember telling you so, out there at your grandmother's house. After the—the hell I'd been through during the war, and after the bitter lonesomeness down here, when Elsie was gone and you and Carol had gone away—unable to work, with all the horror and the fear coming back in full force——

"Then suddenly," he said dreamily, after a silence, his fingertips meeting, his eyes absently fixed upon space, "suddenly to find everything right again; Carol happy, you happy, Hong and Too Fah happy, the sun shining, and the figs getting ripe, and my little boss in her bluejacket's blouse running around here, opening windows and feeding puppies and packing picnic baskets.

"My God!" breathed Jerome, as if to himself, "what would a man be made of, not to appreciate it! But it's *you*," he said again, looking down at her, "it's you that took the risk. And now,' he added, plaintively, "now here comes your birthday, and you don't want anything! Why don't you? When I sent you up to town

last year, to stay at a hotel with Carol, and go to theatres, and buy clothes, you moved straight out to your grandmother's and spent all your time and money in secondhand book stores, buying me the most amazing books, the most glorious haul I've ever had at one time in my life!"

"Well, you had a birthday coming," Jane defended herself. "And besides," she reminded him, displaying the dark blue velvet garment she wore, "I did buy myself this, and the lace collar and the cuffs. And I got the picnic grill—that was really more for me than for you!"

"You're cute, Jenny!" Jerome said, his lashes a little misty as he watched her.

It was her special pet name, not often used, and so all the dearer. To Jane the two little syllables were the sweetest sound in the world. When Jerome called her "Jenny" there was always a certain brightening, like sunrise, in her soul.

She did not speak for a few minutes now, and she was conscious of trembling. But in the end she got to her feet, and Jerome moved in the capacious leather depths of his chair and, putting an arm about her, supported her as she seated herself on the chair's broad arm beside him.

"There *is* something I want for my birthday, Jerry," she said very seriously, almost fearfully, and in a fluttered voice.

He looked at her indulgently.

"Good child," he said approvingly.

Jane rested her cheek against his hair.

"It's nothing tangible," she said slowly.

Jerome moved a little, to look her at questioningly.

"Not a fur coat?"

"Oh, heavens!"

"Not that gipsy trailer for the car, that you and Carol are always talking about?"

"Oh, no! If I wanted *that*," said Jane carelessly, illogically, "I'd ask for it. It's this, Jerry," she went on, with a little difficulty. "It hurts me—it always hurts me horribly—to have you talk of our marriage—as if there wasn't—real love in it."

She stopped, her throat thick. Jerome, with his arm still about her, drew off far enough to fix astonished and shocked eyes on her face.

"My dearest child——!" he stammered, genuinely taken aback.

"Yes, I know," Jane said hurriedly, looking down, one small brown hand busy with the lapel of his old corduroy jacket, "I know you think I'm a child! I'm not, but because you *are* older, and Elsie was older still, and because of the war—when I was only a youngster —you feel older than you are. . . .

"But—whatever it was to you, a year and a half ago when we were married," she went on, after a pause when genuine concern and compunction had kept Jerome silent, "it wasn't—a joke to me. I didn't tell you, but there was—there *was* something—on my side that you didn't know about! I mean—" Jane stammered, stumbling on, smiling resolutely through tears, her drowned blue eyes very close to his own—"that I couldn't—I couldn't have felt more for anyone than I did for you! I didn't tell you, because there seemed to be no need."

Tears got the better of her for a second, and she stopped. Jerome pulled out his big, soft handkerchief and anxiously offered it to her, and Jane gropingly found it and mopped her eyes.

"Hor-hor-horrible confession of a wife!" she said, trying to sound as if she were laughing.

"But darling, darling girl," Jerome said penitently,

aghast at his own stupidity, "I am so sorry! I've been hurting you with my denseness—my nonsense about an old man's darling, and the bird in the gilded cage."

"And May and December!" she supplied with a childish hiccough.

"I see it now," he said, disturbed and ashamed. "Fool that I am! I can see exactly how it has jarred. Ah, Jane, I'm so sorry!"

With a quick movement she left her place on his chair arm and slipped to his knee, where she loved to be, and Jerome, as she dropped her small head on his shoulder, put both his arms about her.

"Jane, darling, why didn't you tell me before?"

"Well," she said, quaintly reasonable, "I thought you'd *see!*"

"See that it was in rotten bad taste," he said remorsefully.

She had not meant exactly that, but she was silent, resting quiet against his heart.

"I'll never offend you that way again!" Jerome said definitely, after a long, contented pause when they had both stared dreamily and unseeingly into the fire.

"It wasn't *offending*," she amended it carefully, "but it reminded me that—that ours *was* a little different from the usual arrangement," she went on, feeling for words.

"And is one hundred—one thousand per cent. a success," he said.

"I don't like to be reminded," Jane said after a while, "of anything that makes me think—makes me remember—that I am not—everything—to you."

"You *are* everything to me, Jane," Jerome told her.

"It . . . hurts me," she said slowly. "Because I . . . I love you . . . so much!"

The words were clearly spoken; each one of them sounded in the silence like a bell.

Jerome drew off a few inches to look at her in surprise, and Jane raised her small rumpled head and answered his look fairly, with something almost like a challenge in her blue eyes. Her face was flushed, like that of an adorably confused child, and as he read her look, Jerome's colour rose, too.

"Jenny——?" he said tentatively, with a faint scowl.

Immediately she reëstablished herself in his arms, her head on his shoulder, his arms drawn about her by both her own firm small brown hands, her eyes out of range.

The man was silent for a full minute. Then, uncertainly, hesitatingly, he said:

"My dear—do you suppose a woman as lovely as yourself could—could indicate to a man what you—what I'm inferring from what you say—without turning his world topsy-turvy?"

It made her tremble with utter ecstasy. She tightened her hands a little, made no other movement.

He cleared his throat, laughed a brief, strange laugh.

"It was not," he reminded her, "it was not so nominated in the bond, my darling. I couldn't, I can't now, suppose—that you've come to care, really, for a man about whom you know—so much that is—well, just dull and stupid!"

Jane childishly dug her head into his shoulder. Her voice came smothered and protesting.

"You're not!"

"Oh, I am, Jane. I'm sixteen years older than you in years—why, that's far more than the difference between you and Carol, and you seem a real mother to her—more than her own mother was," Jerome said. "And I'm

sixty years older than you in experience! I was done, when I came here seven years ago—finished with life. It seemed enough to me that you'd even *like* me," he said humbly; "like to play about here with Carol and the dogs."

She remained a long time with her face buried.

Presently she jumped up and was moving about the room in her customary quick fashion, straightening things, magazines and books, pillows and chairs, getting the room into some sort of order for the night. Jerome remained beside the fire smoking.

"Well, at any rate, I said that!" she said with a sort of innocent triumph. "It's been on my mind for months and now I've said it!"

"And there is to be no more alluding to a marriage of convenience?" Jerome said.

"Please. Because it sounds like an earthquake marriage, or a war wedding," Jane pleaded.

"I am beginning to think that you are a very astounding human being," the man said, watching her.

Jane turned out a lamp.

"I am very glad if you like me," she observed simply.

"Jane, have you ever been to Honolulu?" Jerome asked.

"Honolulu! I've never been to Sacramento!"

"Let's," he said engagingly, "let's go to Honolulu?"

"Oh, Jerry, how could you possibly get away before the proofs are done?"

"Well, they'll be done in a week. We could go in ten days. I rather think I'd like to go to Honolulu," Jerome said.

Jane, winding the mantel clock, looked at him over her shoulder.

"I'd love it! But you might get nervous and miserable, if they came up to you on the boat, and wanted auto-

graphs, and talked about the war and the number of persons that are hungry in Russia," she observed practically.

The man laughed.

"I won't. I promise you! We could leave Carol with Mrs. Graham, couldn't we?"

"Leave Carol!" Jane whirled about, astonished.

"Why not? This," said Jerome, "would be our party, yours and mine. We haven't had our honeymoon yet. You'll have to have a woolly brown coat and a white fur—everyone has those on a honeymoon."

The magic word drowned her in radiant colour; she laughed from sheer excitement. She came near to him, stood before him scarlet-cheeked and astonished.

"But, Jerry, you'll hate it! Crowds and noise and bands and things!"

"And you," he said. "Don't forget you'd be there, who always make happiness for me wherever I am. And beaches—and sunsets!"

"Ah, it'll be *fun!*" Jane said with an indrawn breath. "We have more fun!" she added, as if to herself. And then, from the dimness over by the door, she concluded, in a slightly self-conscious tone, "Good-night, Jerry!"

"Look here, that's not all," he said, glancing toward her, smiling, taking the pipe from his mouth.

"What's not?" Jane said from the shadows.

"Why, don't you always say 'dear'?" he said.

"Oh, do I?" Her voice came constrained and nervous. "Good-night then, Jerry dear," she said, laughing.

"Good-night, you darling! By the way, have you a steamer trunk, Jane?"

"A—a——? Oh, you mean for Honolulu?"

"Yep. Have you got one?"

"Oh, yes—no—but I can get one!" There was a moment's pause. "Good-night, again, dear."

She was gone. She almost always left him so, flitting first about the room, busy with lights and window shades and books, making everything shipshape and snug for the night, saying good-night from the warm shadows by the door. Sometimes Jerome's light burned on for another hour, but Jane was always as sleepy and tired as a child.

To-night she flew upstairs as if a ghost were after her. She reached her room, whirled inside, lighted a lamp, and closed the door. Then for fully five minutes she stood like a statue in the middle of the floor, her hands clasped on her breast, her head flung back, her eyes closed.

After this, suddenly, rapidly, she undressed, washing her sunburned, boyishly firm little face with soap and water, brushing her hair back with a wet, stiff brush until it curled into a dark aureole of waves and spirals against her forehead, putting on fresh white pajamas and a loose, soft, faded old silk kimono.

She glanced about the room; everything was orderly and sweet. A fire had been burning in the airtight stove all afternoon, and the place, even with a wide window opened to the sea, was comfortably warm. Jane carried her lighted lamp to the table beside the bed; upon returning to Storm House as its mistress eighteen months ago she had selected a big empty room next to Carol's for her own, her books and desk were here, her long table with Carol's arithmetic and exercise books upon it.

Outside the window the sea was murmuring to itself in the dark; the eucalyptus branches creaked and complained, the rain was still falling over the windmill and the fig tree and the stretches of rocky beach. It made a soft whispering sound that mingled with the subdued steady whisper of the lamp.

Jane got into bed and opened her book. But she could

not read. Every time a board creaked in the old house her heart rose into her throat, and she moved her eyes to the door.

Half an hour went by, a whole hour. Clocks all over the house could be heard striking eleven. Jane's clock was the last of all; it repeated the sharp strokes quickly. Then for a long time there was no sound except the mingled soft hiss of the lamp and the rain.

After a while Jane noiselessly left her bed and softly opened the hall door. The wind blew her white curtains out straight into the room, the inrushing air was wet and sweet and scented with dead leaves.

She stood for a long while listening in the doorway, her head cocked, one cold foot pressing on top of the other. Then she crept to the head of the stairway and looked down.

If there was a light in the sitting room it always showed through the transom glass above the door; if Jerry was reading in bed, there was a yellow bar creeping under his door sill, on the other side of the lower hall.

To-night there was neither. She stood perfectly still until she was quite sure of it. Neither. Everything was pitchy black—dark—scented with lamps and coal fires and dinner's turkey, as became a country house in mid-January.

Jane went back to bed. Her cheeks were burning red, and there was an ashamed, a puzzled light in her eyes.

She knelt down to say her prayers.

"Jerry, I wonder why you don't love me?" she found herself saying instead. "I always thought that if I loved a person very much he'd have to love me. I love you so much, Jerry dear. It makes me ache all over! You don't love me yet. And I don't know how to make you. This Honolulu trip won't make you. I'm taking

you, you're not taking me! You'll hate going away from home. I wonder if I died, would you love me, Jerry?"

When she got up from her knees her face was wet with tears, her eyelashes stuck together in sopping points. She put the lamp out immediately, and got into bed, and went to sleep.

CHAPTER VIII

YET it was Jane, rather than Jerome, who was happy to get home from a wonderful three-weeks' journey just a month later. In the new brown coat, a belted, silky tan coat with a fur that matched it, rather than the white one he had mentioned, and a cream-coloured hat that came far down over her eyes, she rushed into the garden at Storm House like a whirlwind on a certain soft, green, fragrant February afternoon and, dropping to her knees, caught Carol to her heart in an embrace broken with tears as well as laughter.

"Oh, darling, here you are! We're back. Oh, sweetheart, did you miss Janey? Oh, Jerry!" exclaimed Jane, sitting back on the grass with her arm still about the child, "did you ever see anything as lovely as this place? Is there anything in the world like getting home?"

"It's pretty nice," Jerry agreed, smiling at them both. Carol made a leap for his high arms, then followed her father and Jane as they went into the house.

"Hong, you've made it all look so lovely—and the buttercups, too!" Jane said, opening doors, running like a happy child from place to place. "It's beautiful, Jerry," she said, coming to a stop in the hallway, a hand on each side of his collar, her radiant face raised to his, "let's never go away again, and let's never let anyone come down our lane, and let's live here forever and forever, just we three!"

"Oh, let's!" little Carol echoed fervently.

"I can't wait," Jane said, "to jump into something comfortable, and rumple my hair, and go out and see what's cooking for dinner, and look at our letters."

The old house was full of soft dying sea shadows; the breezes, sweet with new grass and the salt of the sea, blew through the wide-open windows; Jerome went about approvingly snapping up electric lights.

"Gosh, they're an improvement! No more lamps to fill, hey, Hong?"

"Yes, but I loved the old lamps!" Jane lamented.

"They made a good job of this," Jerome muttered, thumbing fixtures, eyeing floor plugs. "It's all right now, with summer coming," he said to his wife, "but you wait until winter shuts down, and you can go to the linen closet or the attic, and flood the place with light. You put all pictures back, Hong, too muchy work, hey?"

"You fix 'em!" Hong said modestly, beaming.

"I'll only have to fix a very few of them, You've done it beautifully," his mistress said appreciatively. "I suppose it is safer," she admitted reluctantly, in Carol's room.

"We have the whole place torn up putting in lights because you *would* run around in your bare feet, worrying about Carol upsetting a lamp," Jerome objected mildly, "and now you're almost in tears over the old lamps. And I break out of my shell and take you to Honolulu, and all you say is that you never want to leave home again, and that you don't know what possessed you to go away!"

Small, laughing, the brown little face framed in the mop of dark hair raised close to his, she put a hand on his mouth.

"Oh, don't scold me!"

"Scold you, you monkey. Why, I'm going to like having electricity a lot," Jerome said, stooping his high, fair head to kiss her, "and as for the trip, I never had such a good time in my whole life."

"I know it!" Jane said, eyeing him almost reproachfully, the expression on her face a combination of vexation and laughter.

"By golly, from the moment we first stepped on the old *Ariadne*," Jerome mused, peering over her shoulder into the downstairs room that had been Elsie's, and afterward his own, and that now was to be changed into a guest room; "from the moment we stepped on the old *Ariadne*," he repeated, "something seemed to drop off me—some worry and burden and strain, and I felt like a kid on a Saturday morning! I'd like to start right off again to-morrow—with, of course, old Carol here," he added, tightening his arm about the child who was clinging to him—"and take another trip—a sea trip. Somehow the thought of big steel trains doesn't seem to appeal, yet. But this experience showed me what a lot of fun the right persons can have when they go off on their travels! There was something about that first day at sea—big horizons, sun shining, women in white dresses even in February, dinner bugle at sunset——"

"And you liked the return trip even better," Jane observed. She turned to the Chinese, who were coming through the hall. "Yes, my trunk up to big room, topside," she explained, "and Boss's trunk up there, too!"

"Boss go topside, hey?" Hong said, with his yellow wax face quite expressionless, and only his small slits of eyes moving.

"Yes." Jane's face was glowing with colour; she laughed confusedly. "To big room—my room. And, Hong, you put plenty towels in bathroom. Boss like

heap lot towels. And that reminds me," Jane said animatedly to Jerome, "I've got to move all your junk into the bathroom, and see if there are hangers in that big hall closet. So come on upstairs with me, Ladybird," she said to Carol, "because I need you! Jerry, I wish we could have a picnic to-night, just to be sure that our shore and garden and everything belong to us!"

"Too cole," Hong, thinking of his roasted chickens, looked back to say over the convulsively moving trunk on the stairs.

"Oh, I know! I suppose it is, as soon as the sun goes down."

She and Carol unpacked the trunks and suitcases, while Jerome went over to his cabin to look at his mail. It was some hours later that Jane deliberately, yet lightly, repeated her unnoticed question.

"You really enjoyed the trip home the best of the two, didn't you, Jerry?"

"Well, it was coming home," he reminded her, rousing himself from deep, contented dreaming by the fire. "And then the *Itchi Ban* is a finer boat than the old *Ariadne*. Besides," Jerome added, lazily moving his eyes across to her chair to smile at her, "besides, I had had the effect of the holiday, coming back. The rest and the interest and the excitement of it all. And that's another reason why I had such a good time on the trip home."

Jane was sunk into her own chair opposite his, a heap of newly opened magazines on the floor beside her, a few loose sheets of letters in her lap. Now she leaned forward and began to fling envelopes and papers into the wood fire; the rising flames illumined her flushed, earnest little face, with its soft bloom of fuzzy gold.

"And the beautiful ladies made it interesting for you, too," she said drily.

Jerome grinned.

"Here's your Robinson—I sent for this!" he said, holding out a slim volume of poetry.

"Oh, thanks, it looks delicious! But, Jerry," Jane persisted, "you'll not find Storm House too awfully dull, after all that fun? You'll not miss Lady Clanrobert and that odious little Jefferson Jackson? If ever she's in a film anywhere that I can see it, you may be sure I'll go to see it," said Jane viciously, "and I'll bet she's *rotten!*"

Jerome laughed joyously.

"Why, you vixen, to be jealous of a little film actress who is perfectly crazy about her new Italian husband, and didn't know I was alive!"

"Didn't know you were alive! She knew you were alive enough to try to teach you the tango!"

"Oh, well, I think that was to make her husband jealous."

"I don't know what it did to her husband, but I know what it did to *me*," Jane muttered. "But it was really Lady Clanrobert," she admitted suddenly, sitting back with flaming cheeks and ashamed and laughing eyes.

"Ah, well, there you have a real charmer," Jerome conceded thoughtfully. "A gentlewoman—and what fun she was! You know, that'd be a nice friendship for us to follow up, if we ever did go to London, Petty," he said. "She'd give us a grand time!"

"But how could we go to London, with the new book not even started?" Jane said, hesitating at first, finally speaking with a little rush.

"Oh, we couldn't. I didn't mean immediately. But in

a couple of years!" Jerome answered unsuspectingly, glancing at a book catalogue as he spoke.

"She was homely," Jane said under her breath, with a touch of little-girl defiance in her voice.

"Who was homely, darling?" Jerome asked, absent-mindedly. "Say, here's that Calderón de la Barca—first edition, only four guineas!" he added animatedly.

"Oh, send for it then, Jerry!"

"You bet your life I'll send for it! She's got more of the real Mexico in this book than any other that I've ever run across." He had taken out his fountain pen; now he outlined the name of the book all the way around.

"She?" Jane asked. "Was it a woman?"

"Oh, sure it was. Husband was our minister down there, or something."

"Calderón de la Barca is a *woman?*" Jane demanded.

"Certainly! Why not?"

"Nothing. Only when you said it, it always sounded to me like a man, somehow."

"Oh, no, a woman. And a darned brilliant woman, too," Jerome murmured, his eyes leaping on from page to page.

"Where is she now, Jerry?"

"In heaven, I hope, darling. She's been dead about fifty years."

"Oh, Jerry—not really!" Jane's delicious surprised laugh broke out, her face was radiant. She was silent awhile, furtively watching him as he pored over the catalogue; his fine long hand and keen face, his concentrated gray eyes. "Jerry, you're handsome!" she said. "Do you know it?"

He looked up, smiling vaguely, vaguely surprised.

"Oh, I suppose one does know it. One's very nurse, you know, in earliest infancy——"

"Well, I don't care, you're handsome to me!" Jane

persisted, laughing but undaunted. She got up, letting the contents of her lap slide into the seat of her chair, and crossed to him; pushing catalogues and papers aside, she took comfortable possession of his knee. "You are the sort of man women make a fuss about, anyway," she said.

"Oh, is that so?"

"Yes, that's so."

"But I should think you'd like that, Jenny. I should think it'd make you feel what a little smarty you were to nab me!"

She sighed luxuriously, tightening his arms about her by drawing on them with both her small hands.

"Perhaps I was too smart!" she said thoughtfully.

"Every wife sees a lot of charms in her husband that nobody else sees," Jerry said casually, kissing the soft fragrant top of her dark hair. "And that's the way it ought to be!"

"Ah, no, but the others all see them, too, in you," Jane asserted, real pain in her voice. "You're a celebrity, you see, and that starts it. They see 'Jerome Delafield' on the ship's list, and they ask somebody, the steward or the purser or somebody, if that is the author—the man who wrote *Postscript to a Battle*—and then they can't wait to meet you!"

"And forget me the next day, when they learn that Lady Clanrobert or Jefferson Jackson is on board!" Jerome said good-humouredly.

Jane was silent, holding his arms tightly about her.

"Don't you think Lady Clanrobert is homely?" she asked after a pause.

"Well, perhaps she is. But it's that nice fresh well-groomed English type—there's a sort of good looks about them, even when their nose bones are too large and their mouths too big!" Jerome said lazily. "There's

a background—a sort of definiteness and sureness about them. They've got a code, and a tradition, and a heritage."

"Well, she's not English, she's Irish," Jane said argumentatively.

"That doesn't hurt her with me," Jerome observed passively.

"No. But then her mother was a marchioness or something," the girl burst out, faintly resentful, "and they must have had piles of money, for she said that when she was just a girl they sent all their horses to the cavalry in the war, and that she and her sister nursed in Lady Clay's hospital."

Jerome shifted his position a little to give her a smiling and faintly puzzled look.

"You mean you don't believe she was rich—that she was pulling a long bow?" he asked.

"No—oh, no!" Jane corrected hastily. "But I mean that she had great advantages," she offered obscurely.

Jerome subsided, looking dreamily into the fire again.

"Oh, sure she had!" he conceded indifferently.

"Well, but don't you think that that *makes* a woman interesting, Jerry; makes her attractive?" Jane demanded.

"Of course it does," he agreed. "She speaks beautiful French and German, for one thing, and, of course, through her father—and her husband, too—she has met a lot of the interesting people in the departmental service over there—knows them intimately, some of them. It's a fascinating life, the life of one of those political Englishwomen."

"Yet it hasn't spoiled her," Jane commented discontentedly, with a faint rising inflection.

If she hoped to be contradicted she was disappointed,

for Jerome was deep in thought and made no answer. After a while he said,

"That was a cute little boy of theirs."

"He was a darling," Jane said slowly. And for a long, long time she was silent. "Jerry," she began after a while, "I want you to love this place so terribly—to be so happy here, and to have your work go so beautifully—that you'll never like any other place in the world, no matter *where* we go!"

"But I do," he assured her, puzzled.

"Yes, I know. But I want you to love it more than ever!"

"I don't see," Jerry said, considering, "what could be added to it to make it more perfect!"

She had straightened up in his arms to look at him. Now she put her head back on his shoulder again.

"I know," she said, in her secret soul. "Two boys—and then another girl—and then a baby for dessert!"

"What are you thinking of, Jane?" he roused himself to ask when the clock struck ten.

"Something lovely," she answered promptly.

"I believe it," Jerome said affectionately. "I don't believe anything goes on in that little cranium of yours that isn't lovely."

"Oh, Jerry, I can be perfectly hateful!" She squared about, and took his ears in her small warm hands, and kissed him childishly between the eyes.

"I don't believe it! I never see it."

"Well, you *will* see it, if you live with me long enough! The trouble is that I'm too happy," Jane said seriously.

"We'll soon fix that," promised Jerome.

"Whose writing?" She was alert again, reaching for a square white envelope that was mixed into the heap of others on the table beside his chair. "Isn't it Sylvia's?"

"Yep. Just business. She's not satisfied with the way Coates is handling the Santa Lolita property, and neither am I. What she really ought to do," Jerome went on indifferently, "is open up that orchard slope and plot it out into acre tracts. Heavenwood is pretty well sold out and there's room for a new development in there—it has beach frontage, you know. I suggested it to Coates, and he apparently blew up and wrote her a long blurb about water rights and what not. He wants her to sell."

"Did Elsie leave her that property, Jerry?"

"Yes, in a way she did—it was darned generous of Elsie. Of course, she had plenty, but that doesn't seem to make some people any more willing to give property away," Jerome said, taking the letter and glancing at its few scribbled lines written in a beautiful and dashing hand with very black ink. "There's nothing in this," he added. "She just thanks me, and says she agrees with me that it would be madness to sell," he said, scrambling up the sheet and throwing it into the fire. "I wrote her that the Board of Education was nosing right around there for a high-school site, and that I didn't think Coates was entirely disinterested."

"She didn't say 'love to Jane,' as usual," Jane observed.

"Yes, Elsie's mother had that property and mortgaged it," Jerome was saying, not hearing her. "And after the mother's death Elsie got it and cleared it up, as part of the estate. Later, she wrote Sylvia that she thought their mother had intended her to have it, and that she was willing to give it to her."

"Is it valuable, Jerry?"

"Well, yes, rather. Rightly handled it would be."

"That was generous of Elsie," Jane said thoughtfully. "Are Sylvia and Garth still in England?" she asked.

"He's in Europe. She's with some of her father's relatives in New York just now," Jerome said. "I imagine —I don't know, for she hasn't said a word about it—but I imagine that there's a rift within the lute there. May be entirely my imagination."

"Isn't it terrible!" Jane whispered, as if she were thinking aloud.

"Isn't what, sweetheart?"

"Oh, people quarrelling, being cold to each other, after they have loved each other so dearly," she said.

"It is horrible. But has that idea just occurred to you?"

"Well——" She pondered. "I think as you grow older things do impress you more," Jane suggested.

"You have a good deal of growing-up yet to do, my dear woman. You are still a little mop-headed, red-cheeked, jealous, domineering baby!" Jerome told her.

She laughed ecstatically, laid her cheek against his.

"I don't care, as long as you like me!" she said contentedly. And with a sudden little shudder she added, "Oh, Jerry, God help me the day you and I have our first quarrel!"

"One wonders how long this fairy tale of ours can go on," Jerome said, half aloud, after a long pause.

Jane made no answer. He looked down at her peaceful little face; she was sound asleep.

The magic continued—continued. "It's like looking out at the world from the middle of a great big bubble—or a crystal ball," Jane Delafield said. "We're enchanted —that's what we are!"

"And don't you ever want to get out of the middle of the bubble, Jenny?" he asked her more than once.

"Oh, no—only afraid it will break! And I'd like," she added wistfully, on a certain mellow summer after-

noon when the first year and the second of her happy wifehood had fled by like dreams, "I'd like it so much if just one other—very little person—could get in!"

"Can't have everything, Jane! I wish you minded it as little as I do," Jerome would say. "You mustn't let that get to be a real sorrow to you, dear."

"But even Elsie," she fretted on this particular occasion, "even Elsie, sick as she was, and so much older than you, Jerry, could give you Carol! And I—I want so much to give you your son!"

"Carol's wonderful," her father said contentedly as the tall, quiet little girl, with her schoolbooks and still with the luminous special smile of her babyhood for her "Janey," came in.

"Well, of course!" But it did not comfort Jane. And when the terrible day she had dreaded, the day of the first real difference between herself and Jerome, came it was this attitude toward Carol and Carol's mother that emphasized it.

It was too slight to be called a quarrel; even if Jerome could conceivably have quarrelled with his companionable, busy little housemate, Jane would have been ill at the mere thought of quarrelling with him.

But the storm came nevertheless.

It began quite simply upon a heavenly late summer morning when Jane had been for more than two years the happy mistress of Storm House. She was twenty-four years old now, yet still so young and boyish and unchanged in manner and appearance that she was far more often taken for the eight-year-old Carol's big sister than for her stepmother.

Jerome had been persuaded to get them a small boat and an old boatman who had been engaged to act as instructor in the art of managing it, and all four had spent three or four hours down at the pier's end, laugh-

ing in the soft, mellow sunshine, splashing the blue, blue water, jerking ropes and wheels about, and revelling in each other's company and in the new toy.

Afterward the little *Waterwings* had been tied to the pier, with the new painter, and the Delafields had come up through the garden to a Sunday lunch on the terrace.

It was then that Jane said, "Let's take her 'round to Los Antonios dock to-morrow and do our marketing by water, Carol!"

"Would you dare?" Jerome asked, looking at her in amazement.

"Would I dare! If it's as smooth as this? Why, I don't believe it's as dangerous as the motor car!" Jane scoffed.

"I know, but boats are boats," Jerome said uneasily. "How about telephoning for the captain and having him go along?"

"Why, Jerry, I've navigated her twice now, and we wouldn't be a quarter of a mile off shore the whole way. We'll simply hug the sand," Jane argued, laughing.

"Well, I don't mind—next week. But I'll be gone to-night. Promise me you won't use the boat when I'm gone," he said. "For I wouldn't have an easy minute!"

A little shadow came into Jane's bright face, and she said sulkily, "I hate that horrible Joe Chickering!"

"Because he asked me to go on a hunting trip?" Jerome asked, amused.

"Oh, well, not quite that. But I hate men who are always herding off alone, keeping their wives out of things!" Jane complained. "The minute he built that studio I knew I'd hate him!"

"My dear, Chickering may be a freak," Jerome said seriously, "but he comes darned near to being a genius, too. It was just a piece of good luck that a fellow like that should build a place down the cliff here."

"We were perfectly happy without *him*," Jane muttered ungraciously, sending Carol a confidential smile aside to soften the effect of her words.

"Well, I know, dear, but here's a man who is building an enormous reputation for himself, and who loves to putter around here in old clothes, talking books, smoking an old pipe, and painting the divinest pictures of eucalyptus and sand dunes——"

"I know," Jane interposed hastily as he paused. "But you like him, and that's enough!" she confessed ingenuously.

"The hunting party is entirely stag," Jerome pursued patiently. "Henderson Brown is coming down from San Francisco, and there may be a couple of fellows from Los Angeles, and that's all!"

Jane served the peach pie carefully, poured the thick cream.

"But, Jerry, you don't like going off and shooting darling little deer!" she argued.

"Oh, we won't get any deer! We didn't last time, a year ago. We'll walk ourselves out of shape, and play some bridge, and sleep like ploughmen, and get home Tuesday all shaken up."

Jane dropped the subject for the moment. But some ten minutes later, when Carol had run off upon some enterprise of her own, she recommenced resentfully:

"It seems to me that if you go off with Joe Chickering and those men hunting, with guns that everyone knows are just as dangerous as they can be, that you ought to let Carol and me run the boat if we want to!"

"I'd be perfectly miserable with fear," Jerome explained.

"But so am I, Jerry, when you're up in the mountains," she argued.

Jerome looked at her, levelly, unsmilingly.

"No, I don't think you are, Jane," he said quietly. "I don't believe you'd be afraid of a thousand guns, if you were going with me, or if I were alone. It's jealousy of Chickering that is upsetting you, and I wish to God you'd get it in hand."

He had charged her with jealousy before; indeed on their very honeymoon he had laughed upon observing it in her. But he had never taken this tone until now. Jane turned white.

She opened her lips as if to speak, closed them again, and sat transfixed, watching him with a sort of terror, her eyes wide.

Jerome made himself go on.

"Now, I tell you, dear, that you will make life a burden to yourself and everybody else if you go on like this," he said flatly. "It's a thing that grows on—on a person, Jane. You ought to like Joe. He's one of our sort, he's a great asset in a lonely place like this, and from the first moment he came you've resented him. He hasn't a dumb wife, as so many genuises have, holding him down, he admires you enormously, and there's no reason on God's earth why he shouldn't be our friend. I like him. Now and then, once or twice a year, I like to go off with him."

"Jerry," she whispered in an odd, breathless voice, "it's only because I love you so!"

He had heard this before; he had steeled himself to hear it now.

"I don't think it's love," he said, not unkindly. "Really I don't, Jane. If every time you went to the club, or telephoned those committee women of yours in the evening, I became suspicious and wretched and silent, I don't think I could call it love. It *wouldn't* be."

She was in agony, unable to believe her ears.

"Jerry, I'd resign from that club to-morrow—truly, truly, I'd love to!" she stammered, gulping.

"I don't want you to, dear," he explained. "That's just what I'm trying to tell you—I don't want you to. I love to have you have your interests outside the house. It makes me love you more, and it makes you love me! It's only natural that a man and his wife——"

"Jerry—please!" Jane whispered in agony. She came to him, and he threw away his cigarette and took her on his knee with one big arm about her. "Don't—don't talk to me like this," she said. "You don't know how—awful—it makes me feel."

Again the man was conscious of forcing himself.

"But, Jane, *somebody's* got to talk to you like this. You can't go on this way!" he said.

"If I had my way," she said, laughing nervously, with one of her earnest kisses on the middle of his forehead, "I'd never let anyone else speak to you, I'd never let anyone else do anything for you, but me!"

"But, darling, don't you see that that's very silly?" Jerome reasoned mildly.

"Not when a person loves anyone as I love you!" Jane persisted.

"Listen, Jane. Don't you realize that that's the quickest way to lose a person's love?" the man asked.

Her eyes flashed, her nostrils dilated, she was beginning to get excited.

"Jerry, how—how dare you say that to me!"

"Because it's true, darling. When we were first married," Jerome said, "you were the best little sport in the world. You ran around here with Carol, nothing put you out, you didn't criticize or question anything——"

"But I wasn't—your wife, then," she whispered, her face scarlet.

"And is that the reason you've stopped trusting me, Jane?"

"Oh, no, no!" she said, encircling his neck with both arms, laying her cheek against his. "It's only—it's only that I was a child, at first. I'm a woman, now, and I belong to you, and I can't bear—I can't *bear* to share you!"

"But, darling, nobody wants to share me. It's only that I want you to be reasonable. Having a friend like Chickering only shows us how rich we are," Jerome pleaded. "Carol's growing up, she'll be wanting friends here—a group in the village, with whom she can have good times——"

"As if I could be jealous of Carol's friends!" Jane said, laughing shakily through tears.

"My dear child," Jerome said seriously, "I am beginning to think that I don't know *what* you can be jealous of and what you can't! I've never seen anything like it. Now, a few days ago," he went on, "you looked at poor Elsie's picture, and said to me, 'I can't bear to think that she gave you the happiness of being a father before I even knew you!' Why, that's ridiculous, dear. You took away Carol's baby picture from my dresser, and put that snapshot of you both there. That was all right, I love it. And yet, after all, Elsie gave me that picture of Carol on the baby's second birthday, and it had a happy association for me, and when I asked you for it, and you said it had gotten broken and you would have it re-framed, it not only hurt me, but I knew it wasn't true!"

She was getting angry again; she went back to her old seat, sat upon it sideways, locked her arms across the back, and looked at him with hard and hostile eyes blazing blue in her brown little face.

"I see you've been saving up all sorts of things to blame me with!" she said childishly, panting.

"Don't be unreasonable, Jane. I haven't been 'saving up' anything, as you call it! It's just that I can't bear to see you distressing yourself for nothing!"

"I don't think it's nothing," Jane exclaimed hotly, "when you go on being so sweet to me day after day, all the time remembering silly things I may have said when I was tired or blue or something! You have never hurt my feelings before, and now you burst out, all at once, with all this about my having changed, and making myself and everyone miserable. And I'll tell you what the real truth is!" she panted, on her feet now. "It's that you—you—*you* have tired of being here, you've tired of me. You want outside people—you never did before! You—you—you were the one who never wanted to go outside of Storm House, who hated the world and all the people in it. And you've changed—not I! You called Los Antonios a lonely place a few minutes ago, but you never used to think it was lonely—you always used to say it was just heaven, being here, shut away from everyone!"

"Jane, dear, you're talking very foolishly," Jerome said pacifically, pityingly.

"I don't care how I'm talking!" she said. She stood for a few seconds at bay, looking at him, breathing hard, perhaps as amazed at her own fury as he was, and then turned like a flash and ran to the house. Jerome shrugged his shoulders, turned back to his books.

Hardly knowing what she was doing, Jane slammed the door of her room behind her and threw herself on the bed in a passion of tears. She cried for a long time, like a heartbroken child; sometimes an audible little wail, "oo—oo—ooo!" escaped her.

After a while she stopped crying and sat up on the bed, her hair tumbled and her cheeks glazed with tears. She wiped the tears away with both palms, still hic-

cougning and shaking with grief, her breast moving stormily, her breath paining her.

Jerome's unbelievable, frightful words returned to her, rang in her ears, deafened her. She groped confusedly, dazedly, for their meaning, and for the meaning of her own. The air seemed full of the flying, stunning blackness of them, striking her violently, hurting her head, confusing her.

Fighting! Oh, she and Jerry were having a fight at last, and he had been cruel to her, and she was lying on her bed crying—she, Jane Delafield, who had been the happiest—so much happier than the happiest!—woman in the world only a few hours ago.

"Oh, my God, what will we do now?" she sobbed, pressing her sopping handkerchief tightly to her eyes.

Suppose she *was* jealous? Wasn't jealousy a sign of love, after all? Weren't there thousands of men who would be only too humbly grateful to have their wives jealous of their affection, to have their wives living only to serve them and make them happy and hang upon their every glance and word?

The weeping burst forth again, uncontrollably. Jane flung herself down, clutching the pillow tightly to her face, choking, an unbearable pain in her throat.

She lay quiet awhile on her back, staring vaguely up at the ceiling. Her breast rose and fell on long, hiccoughing sobs, her mind worked inconsequently, irresolutely. Jerome would be going off with Joe Chickering in a little while; he had packed his bag completely this morning, with herself helping him, unsympathetic but unprotesting. All right—let him go.

Her heavy lids lowered; she fell into a light sleep, still sniffling, still breathing hard, even while she slept. She awakened chilly and damp with perspiration, bewildered, a long time later.

It was late afternoon; the light that slanted into her big airy room was already taking the golden warm tints of sunset. The house was very still; Jane could hear the steady soft sush-sush-sush of the sea down on the rocks. A gate slammed; the wooden gate in the fence under the fig tree that gave upon the region of the farm. That might be Carol coming up from a visit to the always-new puppies. A grinding squeak came faintly from the kitchen porch; Hong was making ice cream. A waste of effort to-night, for Jerome was gone hunting and Jane was not going to eat any dinner at all. However, Carol liked it.

Jane's head was splitting, and her face burned as if she had a fever. She sat staring darkly at the window's softening light, and the gently moving upper branches of the pear tree, and the silent, hanging sickles of the big eucalyptus. An angle of light, striking the mighty shaft of the tree, turned its stripped bark to cream and scarlet and hung like a fire in the heavily clotted foliage.

The windmill whined once, and there was a splash of water.

Slowly, stiffly, Jane got to her feet, still sighing deeply now and then, and went into her bathroom. She began to cry again, as she washed her face, and sat down on the edge of the tub, pressing the rough towel tightly against her eyes, giving way to rivers of tears. But they were quieter tears, and although her face was swollen and stained with them, she was presently sufficiently composed to change her dress and start slowly downstairs, imagining her explanation to Carol as she went

"I have a terrible headache, darling——" Well, that was true. She felt weary, and beaten, and bruised. "I probably got a cold," she thought, "going sound asleep that way without anything over me!"

The soreness of spirit returned. Jerome had said

terrible things to her. She had fancied, poor deluded, conceited fool that she was, she had fancied that he had been as happy as she in these wonderful years. And all the time he had been hating Storm House, and despising her for her jealousy.

Her tears welled up again. She sat down on the stairs and leaned her head against the banisters, feeling utterly broken and desolate. All the joy seemed fled, nothing could ever be again as it had been even that morning at breakfast. The house, instead of being an enchanted castle, with ridiculously, exquisitely happy persons moving about in it, was merely an antedated ugly country house, narrow of halls, steep of stairs, painted stone-gray outside, much cluttered with cheap woodwork and old-fashioned furniture—"of the late President Cleveland period," Jerome had once called it —within.

Nobody had lighted the lower hall lights; nobody would, of course, with Jerome departed for that abominable shooting box of Joe Chickering's and Jane lying upstairs crying. Not that it mattered.

"Oh, it can't be me—*me*—that feels as awful as this!" Jane said, sitting on the stair, putting her elbows on her knees, and pressing her hands over her eyes.

She sat still for endless æons, thinking about it all, about the bitter pity of it. Why, why, why had she gotten so angry? Why had Jerome said so much more than he could possibly have meant?

And how could she reach him at the shooting box and get to him the urgent message that she was sorry—that she wanted to be friends again—that she knew she had carried her silly jealousy too far, and would really try, would try with all her might, to conquer it?

Jealous of Elsie—what a cheap, contemptible thing to admit! Poor invalided Elsie, who had been so gener-

ous to Jerry, who had borne Carol and loved her, and who had had to leave her in her babyhood; Elsie, who had really been the cause of Jane's own coming to Storm House. And jealous of Carol—the demure, affectionate, lovely little stepdaughter! "I must be crazy," Jane summarized it gloomily.

Descending to the sitting room, she peeped in. Her heart turned over, raced with fear and consternation, stood still. Jerome was sitting in his leather chair by the fire, with Carol, silent and dreamy, in his lap.

CHAPTER IX

DIZZY in a sort of vertigo of emotion, Jane stood in the doorway. Jerome looked around.

"Come in and sit down," he said, smiling, and in ordinary tones.

She came slowly to her own chair, her eyes fixed upon him.

"Jerry, you didn't go?" she said, her world rocking about her.

"Nope," he said briefly, lightly.

"Oh, why not?" Jane said, sitting down heavily, her exhausted eyes on his face. "Don't worry about my crying, Carol," she said to the child, smiling with an effort, "I've got a miserable headache! Jerry," she added, looking at him pathetically, "didn't Joe go?"

"Yes, I think the other boys went. I wasn't mad to go," Jerome said casually.

"They went?"

"I think so."

"How long ago?"

"About five."

She looked at the clock; it was ten minutes of seven. Her desolate glance went back to him again.

"Oh, Jerry, that makes me feel *terribly!*" she said thickly.

"It shouldn't, because I didn't care a bit," Jerome said. "Forget it!"

"You didn't stay on my account?" Jane faltered, hoping against reason.

"I couldn't leave you feeling so badly," he said simply.

She sat silent, staring dully into the fire, feeling her head ache and her thoughts a confused, troubled jumble.

Too Fah announced dinner, but Jane could not eat. She left her food untasted on her plate; her pleading, red-rimmed eyes met Jerome's every time he glanced at her.

After Carol was in bed she sat in his lap, as she loved to do, before the fire, and they talked about it.

"Jerry, I'm so bitterly ashamed! I don't know what got into me."

"Well, I know what got into you. It was my saying that you were jealous."

"And I *am* jealous," Jane conceded perversely.

"Sometimes you are."

"But, Jerry—can one help it, if one is jealous?"

"Why, of course you can, you silly little goat! Just —just get *over* it. I hate to see you making yourself miserable, I hate to see you watching and worrying."

"But, Jerry, you didn't have to say all those awful things about that being the quickest way to lose a man's affection, and all that!"

"By George, I think I did!" he protested. "You won't take a hint."

She laughed guiltily, buried her face in his neck.

"And if it hadn't been for me you would have been up in the Sierras!" she mourned, "sitting 'round a wood-fire with those men, having so much fun!"

"Why, that's nothing," Jerome said. "If you *had* had a bad headache to-night——"

"Instead of a heartache!" she interpolated.

"—instead of a heartache," he went on, "I might easily have stayed at home with you."

"What'd you tell Joe?"

"That you'd been feeling wretchedly——"

"Which God knows was true!" she interrupted again fervently.

"—and that you'd turned in, and I didn't like to leave you!"

"You're awfully good to me," she said gratefully, after a silence, in a dreamy, contented tone, her head resting against his shoulder, one arm still locked about his neck.

"Well," he said simply, "I love you!"

"Even," she said, "if I can't give you a nice little boy?"

"Oh, forget that little boy. Who ever said I wanted a little boy? If I had ten children I'd want them all to be girls, anyway."

Jane gave an exhausted, satisfied little sigh.

"Jerry, you're perfect!" she murmured.

"No, I'm not perfect!" he answered, almost impatiently; "there may be half a dozen things about me that you dislike, there probably are. But when it comes to jealousy, it's just sheer waste of time and energy, and it's not like you—it's not worthy of you!"

"I know," she murmured repentantly, guiltily, her lips against his cheek. "But I love you so, Jerry!"

"And is that going to be the excuse for all sorts of scenes, from now on?"

"Oh, *no!*" she said, with half a laugh and half a sob. "You began the scene, anyway," she reminded him in a quick, shy, daring undertone.

"But I didn't know how else to get it over to you, Jane."

"Don't worry. You got it over!"

"Yes, and nearly killed you."

"You'll see," she said, a little awkwardly, after a while, "how wonderful I'm going to be!"

"You *are* wonderful, dear. It's only that I hate to have you unhappy. Why, how," Jerome demanded simply, "how could I love you more? What *don't* I do?"

"Nothing. Everything!" she assured him obscurely.

"And yet, Jenny, you are not happy."

"Oh, but yes I am—absolutely!"

"You are not, I see it. And isn't it silly to spoil present happiness by worrying for fear something will happen?"

"I suppose it is."

"Most men go down to their offices every day, lunch with their friends, spend a few afternoons or an evening a week at their clubs," Jerome said, "and keep their wives perfectly content. I'm so dumb that apparently I can't satisfy you even by being here for three meals a day, seven days a week, and perhaps going down to Chickering's for lunch every other Thursday."

"I know. I'm awful. Or, at least, I *was*. But I'm cured!" Jane told him. And after a minute, in which she was silent, rubbing his thumb with her own small, sturdy thumb as her hand clung to his hand, she added, "Maybe it's partly this, Jerry. That your kind of man really doesn't know anything about love!"

"How do you mean?" Jerome asked, unalarmed, even a little amused.

"Well, you've never been in love, Jerry."

"Oh, is that so?"

"Yes," she persisted, "that's so. You loved Elsie, and she was wonderful to you. And you love me——"

"You apparently have an extremely hazy idea how much," he observed.

"Well. But that's not being in love."

"It's a great deal more," Jerome asserted.

"In a way, I think it is." She was oddly earnest, oddly impressive, as she sat up straight and looked seriously into his eyes. "The love between two persons like us

is much, much more than just being in love!" she stated.

"Of course it is! Almost three years together, and the first time I see my wife in tears is to-day."

"Oh, I've often cried!" Jane said. "Don't you remember, after the collision in the car, a year ago?"

"Certainly I remember! And I remember the tears over the baby, down at the ranch. But you know what I mean, Jenny. Tears of anger—tears of quarrelling——"

"I know," she interrupted hastily, looking conscious, sighing again. "And you'll never see them again!"

"I hope not. And I think it's a marvellous tribute to us both that all this time we've been——"

"The most wonderful companions that ever were in the world," she supplied luxuriously, dreamily, as he paused. "Jerry, were you ever in love?" she asked.

"You ought to know."

"Then I'd say you never have been," Jane decided. "No, no," she hastened to say, laughing with still reddened eyes, "I'm not going off into a tantrum again. I mean that I am perfectly satisfied that you never have been."

His elaborately apprehensive look subsided, and Jane laughed again. "You never really went roaring mad over a woman, did you, even as a young man?" she submitted.

"Oh, I suppose I had cases," Jerome conceded indifferently.

"No, but I mean—agony," Jane said soberly. "I mean the breathless, sleepless, no-appetite kind. I don't say it's the real thing," she added, feeling for words. "I don't say it's even—well, admirable. But it's—the thing all the great novels and plays are written about. It's the immortal flame—and the blue flower—and the—what were you reading about Pompilia last night?—the glory of the world, the splendour——"

"Sex, you mean?" he asked calmly, amused by her fiery efforts to express herself.

Jane subsided, shaking her head.

"That makes it sound so animal!"

"Well, seriously, isn't it?"

"I don't think so, Jerry. It may have that in it, but it's more than that. It's fever and breathlessness and excitement."

"I know what a kid feels, when he takes his girl to a football game," Jerome offered.

"Oh, you're hopeless!" said Jane. She rested her head against him quietly. "And I think that's what scares me," she said after a while; "the feeling that you're not yet forty, and that all the women in the world are ready to fall in love with you, and you don't know, really, what it is! Because the circumstances of our marriage," she continued, "were——"

"Ideal," Jerome supplied decidedly.

She allowed the word to stand unchallenged, lying silent against his heart for a long, long time, her thumb moving now and then upon his thumb, and her breast rising involuntarily in an occasional deep, reminiscent sob.

"Jerry, where were you living when you were young—eighteen—twenty?"

"In New York, and then in New Haven, Connecticut, while I was in college."

"In a house?"

"No, in a very dignified, old-fashioned apartment, with my mother."

"And she was ill?"

"Yes. Much sicker than we thought. But we all knew there was something wrong."

"Who were 'we all'?"

"Oh, aunts—cousins. I had bunches of cousins."

"And what were you doing, say on your twenty-first birthday?"

"Finishing college just then, I guess. And then I went on in medicine."

"Why medicine, dearest?"

"My father had been a doctor, you know. A general practitioner. He'd have been a gland specialist to-day—he was crazy about glands. And he died when I was seventeen, rather holding the idea that I was going to follow in his footsteps."

"Well, naturally, the only child! And, Jerry, weren't you falling in love with girls all that time?"

"More or less, I guess."

"But there wasn't ever one special one?"

"No, I know there wasn't. I remember wishing awfully that there would be. My mother was anxious for me to marry, or at least want to marry, and I was, too. A young man doesn't want to feel out of it—all his friends are getting engaged. But—I don't know, I couldn't seem to get the hang of it!" Jerry confessed.

Jane laughed delightedly.

"And then the war came?"

"Well, the year before the war I'd gone to a training camp. And then, in that winter, an aunt of mine came to live with my mother, and in February Mother died—quite suddenly. We all knew that America was going to get into it then, and I immediately went down to Washington, offered my services——"

"And gave up your career!"

"As a doctor, maybe. But I wasn't especially enthusiastic about it, anyway. I wouldn't have graduated for another five months, and I felt a sort of reluctance—a sort of dubiousness—about the whole thing. At the time, of course, I said I'd finish my course as soon as I came back. But there wasn't to be any coming back!"

"Ah, darling," the girl said in a tender, loving voice, rubbing her cheek against his, "don't say that! You came back."

"Yes, but, my God—what!" he shuddered. "Can't bear to think of it, Jenny," he said. "They debated about me, my aunts and the doctors. I sat around like a fool. All that winter—November until March, when I came out here—is just one black horror."

"Came out to acacia trees and the Pacific and eucalyptus and gulls and peace," she said.

"To Paradise," he summarized it all thoughtfully.

"Little dreaming that the snake," said Jane, "in the form of your child's governess, was about to wriggle in!"

Jerome laughed, a contented, sleepy, affectionate laugh, his arm tightening a little about her.

"Ah, Jane, you're cute!" he said.

"I hope I'm *something*," Jane said, as severely as if she were speaking to her small self, rather than of her, "something that makes up to you for the way I act!"

"One fight in every two years and seven months won't kill us, Jane," said Jerome.

"Jane, I believe you're beginning to like me," Joe said a week or two later.

"I always liked you, Mr. Chickering!" Jane protested. But not without a quick laugh and flush and a sideways glance for Jerry.

"She has queer ways of showing her affection sometimes," Jerome said drily.

"Decidedly," Joe agreed, gravely. Jane laughed again.

"What have I ever done to make you think I didn't like you?" she asked the guest brazenly.

"Nothing!" Chickering said promptly. "You sent Jerry off with me hunting last week—I got poison oak

and Jerry turned his ankle, but that wasn't your fault! And you personally invited me to come and paint here on your terrace. Could love go further?"

Jane laughed obscurely, the colour deepening in her happy face.

"You're too smart!" she observed in dissatisfaction.

"Well, anyway, you're beginning to like me!" Chickering repeated contentedly. He tipped his head sideways, squinted at his canvas. Jane watched him with the eternal fascination of the outsider as he squeezed the oily curls of ultramarine and chrome upon his palette.

"The maddening part of your work," she observed, "is that when you begin I think it's perfect. And then somehow it all goes gooey. I sort of lose it, probably because I'm such an utter bird-brain where art of any sort is concerned!"

"You are my sincerest critic and truest friend, never forget that," Jerome, stretched on the grass, said sleepily from under his hat. "She's trained herself to be a darned good critic of letters. I don't know how she is with art!" he added.

"Her criticism of my work is painfully acute," Joe Chickering said with his nice abrupt laugh. "It comforts me to think that it's true of almost every other painter's, too!"

"Jerry, don't go to sleep on that damp ground—this is September," Jane directed anxiously. "Carol, haul your miserable father off that grass. Go on, now, Jerry, go on, now, be good, or we'll have you sick! Please, darling. Go into your study and lie down, and I'll be in immediately and put a rug over you."

"I'm capable of putting a rug over myself," Jerry said, drunk with sleep, dizzy and yawning, as he staggered painfully toward the house, escorted by Carol. "I may be tinged with the fatal need of repeating a

success, and more prone than ever to engaging in utterly irrelevant divergences," he added, majestically, departing, "but I can still pull a rug over myself!"

"That was a criticism he was quoting; it just made him *wild*," Jane confided to the painter when they were alone. "He'll have a hundred good ones—raving over him, flattering him terribly. And then one bad one, like this one in the *Saturday Review*, will simply floor him."

"He's the darnedest fellow!" Joe Chickering said affectionately, wiping a brush upon a mud-coloured rag and looking after Jerome's vanishing form with a laugh.

"Jerry?"

"Jerry," the man said, nodding. "He's rare, that one."

"I think so," Jane agreed, with a little barb of fear stirring deep down under her pride.

"One of the most extraordinary men I've ever known," Joe went on. "Simple as a kid, most ways, and deep as the ocean out there in others. I've never known anyone so big to be so—so unspoiled, so simple and fine. Sometimes I think he hasn't grown up yet, and other times I think he was born a hundred years old, 'way above the petty emotions of us others!"

Jane did not answer. There was happiness, love, complete consent in her heart. But there was something else, too. "Oh, Jerry, my big, fine, clever, gentle sweetheart!" some aching chord within her seemed to be crying. "Don't ever be too big for me! Don't ever grow so high that you leave me behind!"

"Doesn't he ever get mad?" Joe demanded, looking over his shoulder.

"Jerry? Oh, no! Once," Jane corrected herself conscientiously, "he got sort of angry at me, because he thought I was making a fool of myself!"

"He had his nerve," Joe said.

"But he was right," Jane said meekly, demurely. And she smiled at her guest out of the corners of her blue eyes, childishly. "For the rest," she went on, "he's just—always—as you know him. He puts that—whatever it is—magnetism——" She floundered. "I don't know what it is that Jerry's got!" she confessed, laughing, but with tears of love and loyalty in her eyes.

"Charm. He's bursting with it!" Chickering helped her.

"Well, charm. It means," said Jane, "that if he walks over to the farm with me, or down on the shore, or if he's home to dinner, I'm alive. If he's away, I'm dead. I never get used to him, I never hear his voice too much——"

She stopped abruptly.

"Oh, my God, imagine hearing Jerry's voice too much!" she murmured, smiling as if at an absurdity, speaking to herself. "Every letter I get doesn't matter until he sees it, everything I think isn't anything until I talk to him about it!" she added. "At breakfast, watching him stir his coffee——"

Again she stopped, blinking tears from her lashes.

"You'll think I'm an utter fool!" she said, laughing.

Chickering did not look at her; his eyes were fixed upon the ocean, caught in a level line of amethyst blue between the canyon's steep walls.

"No; I don't think you're a fool," he said, clearing his throat. "Only—of course—it's like carrying dynamite around with you," he said, after a pause. "Annihilation due at any moment!"

"How do you mean?" Jane asked quickly.

"It's dangerous, Jane."

"What is?"

"To love anyone that much," Joe Chickering said, a little awkwardly.

Jane was silent for a while. Then she said briefly, "But I can't help it!"

"Lucky, lucky you! But then, the first day I came in this gate," Joe said, "I knew I'd stumbled upon something unique." He took off the round, disreputable old velours hat he wore when painting and swept it in her direction. "Congratulations, madam!" he said.

Half an hour later he was still painting busily, and Jane dreaming, with only an occasional word, when Hong appeared on the steps between the house and the terrace.

"Lady come," said Hong.

"Lady come?" Jane echoed. Then cautiously, "Don't wake boss! Boss tired."

"Not wake boss," said the Oriental.

"Jane," said a tall, slender woman, in a loose white coat and small white hat, appearing behind him.

Jane looked up, puzzled and smiling, and got to her feet. She took a slow step or two toward the caller.

Then suddenly her manner changed, and with a quick movement she was beside the woman in white, catching her hands, kissing her impulsively, surprise and laughter and welcome all in her voice as she said, "Sylvia!"

"Are you surprised?" asked the other, laughing, coming down with Jane toward the seats on the terrace where Joe Chickering stood at his easel watching them.

"But—we hadn't any idea of it!" stammered Jane. And remembering the conventions, one arm partly about Sylvia, she added, "Mrs. Bellamy—Mr. Joseph Chickering."

"Mrs. Bellamy," Chickering said, putting his brush with his palette into his left hand and extending his painty big right one, his dazed eyes fixed upon her beauty in a sort of trance.

"Mr. Chickering," said Sylvia, and her voice was

like a peal of slow silver bells, "is so proud that he refuses to remember a lady who once gave him a pair of cuff links made in the shape of little gold footballs, and kissed him—into the bargain."

Chickering, about to relinquish her hand, seized it again, drew closer to her, staring down through his strong glasses, smiling and reddening.

"You're the little yellow-headed kid at the Southerlands'!" he exclaimed.

"Mrs. Southerland was my grandmother," Sylvia said, laughing.

"But you—but you—but, my Lord, how could you remember me all this time!" sputtered Joe. "You were about six!"

"Eight. It was a great event for me. You were the idol of the whole crowd," Sylvia said prettily. "It was a special favour, to comfort me for having to stay home with a cold, I believe, on the day of the game, that I was allowed to make the great presentation."

"I have those cuff links yet!" Joe said.

"One of them," she amended, laughing, as they all sat down. "You can't make me believe you have both. Jane, is this filling your hospitable heart with all sorts of dismay?" she said.

"Oh, Sylvia, no! If you only knew what fun it is to see you! But all the way from New York!"

"No, from New Orleans really, but that's almost as bad. I was there with the Hollisters," Sylvia explained, "when some things came up that made it advisable to come out here. And as the Hollisters were about to come, under the most luxurious circumstances, to their Santa Barbara house, I came along. Their man motored me up this morning, and dropped me at your gate about ten minutes ago, and I'm to go to the Santa Lolita Inn if I'm in the way."

"In the way!" Jane smiled radiantly. "Jerry'll be so delighted," she said.

"Well, now," said Sylvia with a great happy sigh, "tell me everything! How is he, and how are you, and how is the new book going, and how's Carol, and when are you all coming East?"

"She is the most beautiful person I have ever seen," Jane thought. "She's *amazing!*"

For Sylvia radiated charm and beauty, polish and culture and shining intelligence, as she talked. There was a finish about her, a sort of chiselled and restrained exquisiteness that had been enormously deepened and increased in the three years since Jane had seen her, or perhaps had been too subtle for the younger Jane to notice. But it was there now; it seemed to Jane that a sort of light played over Sylvia, and was captured in her firm, creamy, colourless skin, and her lambent, glowing, hazel-brown eyes, and the soft pale glitter of her gold hair.

"I know my spare room's all in order," Jane said, after a while. "And I know Hong's enchanted."

"You still have old Hong?"

"Have him! He has us. He's been in this one house fifteen years. And Jerry! I'll have to wake Jerry," Jane said, leading the way up the terrace steps.

The screen door at the side of the house beyond the high laurels slammed, and she ran ahead eagerly.

"There's Jerry now!" she called back.

Sylvia saw her catch the tall man with her eager hands, saw him bend over Jane's small figure as she told him the great news. Then Jane went into the house, and Jerry came down to greet the visitor.

Jerry saw a tall, slender woman in a simple white travelling coat and white hat silhouetted against the deepening rosy colour of the afternoon sky and the sea.

He saw the sweep of the incredibly brilliant soft gold hair and the questioning, friendly smile that moved the beautiful mouth; he saw above all, and through all, piercingly, poignantly sweet, the light in Sylvia Bellamy's amber eyes.

And Sylvia looked up at him, a big man loosely clad in tweeds, the collar of his white shirt open at the throat, the waves of his bright hair flung back, and the kindly, keen, pathetically appealing look she remembered upon his fine, pain-chiselled face; the gray eyes, the big firm hand, the gentleness of him, that was still so strong, the tenderness, that was so much protectiveness, too. Something else, outside and beyond them both, some brooding great presence in the sunset-lighted garden and the warm, aromatic air, seemed to swoop down and hold them silent, their hands locked, their eyes fixed upon each other, and for a while neither spoke.

Then Jerome, as if there was something significant, some meaning or message in the three short syllables, said:

"Sylvia!"

CHAPTER X

THE long, sweet, silent days began to drift by, each one—Jerome said, Sylvia said, they all said—more incredibly, more poignantly exquisite than the last.

Sometimes in the dreaming mornings there was a dim gauzy veil over the sea, a veil through which the sound of Los Antonios's fog horns came dully, softly, and through which the little fishing smacks appeared and disappeared mysteriously now and then, without sound, reflecting their brown sails in the silent satin reaches of the fog-encircled sea. On such a morning there was something eerie, something unearthly, in the crying of the gulls over the old pampas trees and bushes and pepper trees of Storm House, something ominous and brooding in the occasional plump fall of a fig from out the clothy, thick, odorous foliage above the terrace.

The leaves on the apple and prune trees were beginning to turn yellow, to sail slowly downward through thinning air, the ground was carpeted in circles with the purple fruit. Wood fires, tended by Mexicans in the lower orchard, sent long winding sheets of soft gray smoke straight up, through windless air, to the hovering, cloudless blue of the sky.

Sometimes at sunset whole galleons of cloud formed on the western edge of the world, across the wide waters that were steely in twilight and tipped with red. Carol and Jane had called these autumn panoramas for many happy years "Noah's animals going into his ark," and they loved still to find them.

"Look, there's the elephant, Carol—see!—with the baby elephant—only he looks a little like a zebra—right there, pushing up against her trunk."

"Jane," Carol's voice said once, in a most harmonious hour of tea and talk and twilight, "if an elephant had a baby, or anything—say a lioness—had a baby, would Noah have taken that baby along into the ark?"

"Oh, certainly!"

"But it says just one of each, a male and a female," Carol persisted with the deadly loquacity of eight years.

"Yes, but the reason they *took* a father and a mother was just to have babies, don't you see? So that there'd always be lions or elephants or bees, or whatever it was!" Jane explained easily.

"Biology presents no terrors to us," Jerome said proudly from his steamer chair. "It would give your hair a permanent wave to hear the way Jane handles these things!"

"Carol and I understand each other," Jane said affectionately, rubbing her cheek against Carol's dark hair as the child, half lying against her, half sitting on the arm of her chair, turned to smile before looking off to sea again.

"Janey," said the child, "if there were only two bees in the ark, of course they wouldn't need *much* honey, but where would they get the little they *did* need?"

"I never thought of that!" Jane said lazily.

"Maybe one of the ladies took a bunch of flowers in?" Carol suggested brilliantly.

"Maybe. Or perhaps a pot of growing flowers, to make the place cheerful."

"Oh, *that's* what they did!" said Carol, relieved.

"Carol, be less active mentally, for the love of Allah!" Joe Chickering said.

"I don't know what 'active mentally' means," Carol

said promptly, falling silent immediately none the less.

"Tarweed—that's that sweet, gummy smell," Sylvia said drowsily after a pause. "And eucalyptus, that's the spicy, aromatic one. And wood smoke—oh, Paradise, Paradise, Paradise!"

"And seaweed," Jerome added.

"Seaweed! All the beautiful words together."

Sylvia had been ten days at Storm House, ten days of idleness and play and talk, cruising on the *Waterwings* upon the silky blue sea, driving into Los Antonios with Jane for morning shopping. She had shared Jane's desultory wandering among market and post office and amazing drygoods emporiums, shared her wayside chats with neighbours: an old priest in his dusty soutane, Boy Scouts, freckled and earnest, camping on the Delafield meadows near the beach; club women in incredible corsets and decently long voile skirts, waylaying young Jane—so boyishly sweet and frank and simple in her white blouse and pleated skirt and red tie—behind whitewashed picket fences to display dahlias or grandchildren.

There had been many hours on the terrace, there had been a supper in Joe Chickering's studio barn—a lofty, deliciously shadowy place with a soft sediment of clean meal still clinging to its high rafters, and hames and bridles hanging here and there on whittled pegs against its lofty walls. Joe kept house in what had been the granary, his modest cot visible through the opening into the harness room, and Sylvia and Jane sat idle with itching fingers while he eagerly manipulated his stewpot and tore open bags of rolls and flimsy baskets of sweet, hard, brown muscat grapes for their entertainment.

Jerome and Jane had not hurried Sylvia; she told them that she was grateful.

"You darlings must suspect that I've come out here

for a purpose," she said, after a few days. "It isn't only the Santa Lolita property, although it's that, too. And it isn't only the pleasure of seeing you both again, although that might have brought me all by itself. But Garth wants a divorce, and I'm applying for it. Not for his sake so much," Sylvia said, in a lifeless, quiet tone, "for I've been refusing it to him for years. But for Bette.

"She's very young, only nineteen now, and they've a scrap of a daughter. They live in Brittany. Garth appears to be taking a long sabbatical, or something—anyway, he's not working. He can't get a divorce without involving her, and she seems to have appealed to the finest in him, to the protective side of him. He doesn't want to hurt her, now or later. And my hands were tied, there in New York, because I couldn't move without involving her, either.

"So I came West, meaning to see you here and then establish myself somewhere close to you for the requisite year. And as a reward of virtue," Sylvia finished, with her grave upward look and the sudden exquisite brightening of her smile, "I've fallen into the happiest, the most wonderful, time of my life."

"I wish I could believe that!" Jane said affectionately, dubiously.

"It's true. It's so much less than the truth!" Sylvia answered.

"But we're so dull here!" the younger woman complained happily, confidently, her own glowing eyes denying the phrase almost before she coined it.

"So many persons could live a life like this all along the shores of the world everywhere," Sylvia said one morning. "Why do you suppose they don't? Men who could retire with a few comfortable thousands a year and have all this—the farm and the garden and the beach. . . .

"It's insidious," she said. "I can feel it getting into my blood. Nothing seems to be happening—everything is happening, all the time. The days are too short. I can't wait to see Molly's foal, to watch the men gathering the figs, to start for supper on the shore."

"That's the astonishing part of it," Joe Chickering agreed. "It takes firm hold on you, this kind of life. I've lived in Paris and been bored, wondered what to do with a spare afternoon or evening. I've felt lonely, ghastly solitary, right in the very centre of London or New York. But here! Here, every day seems a sort of adventure."

"Perhaps we're all weak-minded?" suggested Jane.

"No, our types are too different," Jerome reminded her. "Here is Joe now. He comes nearest the sort that has always hunted out lonely places to work in, and wander about. But myself—why, when I came out here, a nervous wreck, years ago, I should have supposed myself going mad here, with solitude and idleness, the third day! Then here's Jane, at the age when most women are running to movies and dances——"

"And beauty parlours and women's luncheons and bridge games and dressmakers," Sylvia added as he paused.

"Well, exactly. Here's Jane pretending to be happy here, too."

"Making a pretty good bluff," Jane said drily.

"And finally Sylvia," Chickering said, "the aristocrat—the silken and perfumed product of the big city, the great lady who knows all about the books and plays and fashions of the big avenues, and who is singing in the opera, and what the gossip of the downtown lunch tables is; Sylvia who has given up her manicure and her modiste and her study club and her New York apartment——"

"Gawd 'elp 'er!" Sylvia said lazily, unruffled, stretching out an exquisite smooth hand to nick the ash from the tip of her cigarette into a waiting tray.

"Sylvia has caught it, too!" Chickering finished triumphantly.

"No," Jane said, reducing the argument from fantasy to fact; "but we *do* have fun!"

In the mornings Carol would go off to school before Sylvia, marvellous to look upon, appeared, loitering out from her room in drifting draperies and little Turkish slippers. Jerome would vanish to his cabin for work hours. Sylvia would putter about beside Jane like a contented child for a while, and go back to her room to get into linens or tweeds for the trip into Los Antonios in the car or the leisurely wandering over the farm that was Jane's programme.

Luncheon was just as she remembered it in her half sister's day, only happier, more relaxed, somehow. Jerome would come down tired and cold and nervous from his four hours of concentration to sit silent and impatient until the salad was served and the rolls passed; Carol, whose school hours were for the morning only, would lie on the deep grass of the terrace, playing with the cat or dog.

Sylvia, as Jane had realized gratefully on the very first opportunity, had the grace to be silent until the meal was commenced; Jane herself was always busy—murmuring to Too Fah, moving plates and cups, perhaps swiftly and skilfully mixing a salad dressing.

Then suddenly they were all happy and at ease, laughing and talking again, Jerome restored to sanity and content, Carol watching them over her big slice of bread and strawberry jam, Jane satisfied—one more daily crisis successfully weathered.

"Where's your baby, Jane? You're just the sort that

ought to have a pack of the creatures toddling around here. Or is Jerome baby enough?" Sylvia asked, after a day or two.

Over Jane's bright face a cloud fell suddenly. The two women were in the guest room, and Sylvia had been commenting appreciatively upon the improved house: the white woodwork and gay flowered wall papers, the old-fashioned homely comfort that somehow made excusable even the awkwardness and stupidity of the original design.

"My baby?" Jane said sadly with a little smile and a sigh. "He's a naughty, stubborn, disobedient baby. He just—doesn't come."

"I didn't know," Sylvia said in a gentler tone. "I'm so sorry. What's the answer?"

"Ah, if I could only tell!" Jane exclaimed soberly. "They come to the Mexicans and Portuguese, to every absolutely penniless family about here!" she said with a youthful sort of patience and philosophy that was combined oddly, Sylvia thought, with her small sturdy person, her sunburned, childish round face and blue eyes. "The women are simply heartbroken when there's going to be a new one—they say so. And I don't blame them.

"Why, there's an English family here, the Rodneys—you know the sort of English gentlefolk," explained Jane, "who simply can't do anything? They've tried an agency for filters, and then they had a languishing sort of tea room, and then he became resident manager of a country club that petered out, and she kept bees. Jerry and I used actually to take them over food, they got so low down—cream and eggs and vegetables we said we couldn't use.

"They have seven children, little blond things who don't look to be more than ten minutes apart. And last

week, if she didn't tell me that there's to be another!—with not a stitch of clothes for it, and not enough food for the seven others, much less an eighth, and no particular strength or vitality to give it."

"Isn't it a mystery?" Sylvia said. "I never really wanted a child," she said. "I never was sorry not to have one. But if I had those years with Garth—ten years!—to live over again I'd feel very differently about lots of things."

In one of the long talks the two women had, talks deepening in intimacy and affection every day, Jane asked, "Did you know that when you and Garth were here, nearly five years ago, that he—he—made me sort of unhappy?"

The childishness of the phrasing would have disarmed Sylvia if indeed she had needed any disarming. She looked up, laughing, her eyebrows arched.

"No? But I'm not surprised," she said.

"It was my first experience," said Jane, upon whom the need of confession had been pressing ever since Sylvia's arrival.

"Jane! But do you know, I suspected it," Sylvia admitted, smiling and frowning. "I suspected it because, in the first place, that was the usual procedure, with Garth. And in the second place, do you know that I could feel, from the way he said good-bye to you, that foggy morning we left—do you remember?"

"I remember."

"Well, I could tell from his manner that morning that he had gone just a trifle too far, and had been snubbed, and felt rather flat," said Sylvia.

"I had gone too far, too," Jane said honestly. "It made me feel sick all over—afterward. But it took me—like a prairie fire!"

"I can imagine just how far you would call too far,

knowing you, Jane," Sylvia said kindly, with her clear amber eyes fixed affectionately upon the other woman. "Most persons wouldn't call that too far, nowadays."

"The only thing I *did*," admitted Jane impulsively, ingenuously, "was meet him on the terrace one evening—it was only about half-past nine—to go over to the farm and see the Saturday night excitement there. But for some reason the whole place was as quiet as the grave, and I got most horribly scared and ashamed of myself—especially as you had been so kind to me.

"But, really," she stumbled on, laughing at her own confusion, as Sylvia continued to regard her with attentive, sympathetic eyes, "really—it was a sort of midsummer madness—excitement——"

"My dear child," Sylvia said superbly, "don't tell *me* what it was! It—" She made an eloquent gesture with outspread palms—"It makes the world go 'round!" she said.

"Well, it was my baptism of fire," Jane said, with a deep sigh.

"All girls go through something like that," Sylvia assured her.

"I never had. I didn't know it existed," Jane confessed.

The other woman, lying luxuriously propped against a mound of couch pillows, regarded her thoughtfully.

"And then, a year later, with Jerry?" she asked. "Was that the same thing?"

"Oh, my gracious, no!" Jane laughed joyously. "In the first place," she went on, sobering, "we were married right after Elsie's death."

"Yes, I knew that."

"You see, I'd gone back to my grandmother's house. And Carol—poor scrap!—had been put into what *sounded* like a wonderful camp for small girls, and was

going to follow it right on into what *sounded* like a marvellous school. And that didn't work at all," explained Jane. "Carol immediately got sick, I was moping around in San Francisco like a cat hunting for her kittens, and Jerome was almost crazy with loneliness down here. So we all got together again as fast as we could——"

"On the only permissible terms," supplemented Sylvia.

"Well, yes. And months afterward," Jane said exultingly, "Jerry—the old idiot!—solemnly apologized for taking advantage of my youth and ignorance." She paused, shining eyes fixed dreamily upon space.

"And a new order set in," Sylvia supplied.

Jane turned scarlet under her summer tan.

"Well, I didn't mean quite that," she agreed, laughing, "but it's true."

"I hate people who are as happy as you two!" Sylvia said after a while.

CHAPTER XI

JANE, what's to prevent you and the Infanta coming, too?" Jerome said persuasively.

Jane, straightening books at the long drawing-room bookcase, sat back youthfully on her heels and frowned thoughtfully.

"Well, Nitcha, the miserable hound dog!" she said.

"I thought Nitcha was very busy with a litter?"

"Well, she is. She has three darlings! But she's sort of—gone wild," Jane explained, laughing.

Sylvia, sitting beside the dying fire, was obviously ready for a journey. She was fully dressed in her smart little tweed suit, a brilliantly coloured scarf about her neck, a small rough hat pulled down over her eyes. She smiled back, but did not speak. Jane thought she was rather pale, and seemed unusually silent on this quiet, brooding, warm September morning.

"This is her third lot," Jane went on interestedly, animatedly, of the airedale mother, "and she's never acted this way before. But she just doesn't seem to care for them one bit! She hangs around the kitchen door all the time, and only goes back to see them at mealtimes. Carol and I even took them away yesterday afternoon, and she was perfectly calm. So we're going to spend the morning down there in the barn, where they are, and make a great fuss over them, and sort of—reconcile her to them."

"Somehow that doesn't seem like a good mother," Sylvia conceded.

"Maybe she's joined a woman's club, and has been

asked to read a paper on the abolition of capital punishment?" Jerome asked, unsmiling, nervous, constrained.

Jane flushed and laughed again.

"Will you and Sylvia get your lunch in Santa Lolita? It's nearly eleven now," she asked.

"I have to appear in court at twelve!" Sylvia said. "But it seems such a shame to drag Jerry," she added. "*He* doesn't have to!"

"No, but he knows Judge Foster," Jane said, straightening toppled books with small, expert hands, shoving them along shelves, stacking other books into vacancies. "And he's not working at the minute," she added, allowing a book to fall open on her hand, seizing a few lines here and there as an animal idly grazes.

"Where does one eat lunch in Santa Lolita?" Sylvia asked in a rather low tone, without looking at Jerome.

"Well, there's the Dolores Hotel, and the Arkopolis Grill, there's Ye Saffron Sunshade, but that's kind of messy and sandwichy! Jerry," Jane broke off to say animatedly, "don't forget the coffee pot, will you? A large one—two quarts, if you can."

"Library paste, coffee pot, scissors with sharp point, Parmesan cheese, cloth for jelly bag," Jerry read from a list immediately extracted from his pocket.

"Paper dolls!" Carol commanded.

"If I can. You can't always get them, you know," observed her father. "Well, how about it, Sylvia?" he said.

"One minute," Sylvia said, with a fleet swift glance into his eyes. She went to the door, hesitated, looking back, and turned again toward the stairs. Immediately she went up to her room, orderly and wide and airy in the autumn morning. Leaves were moving outside the windows; the fog in the garden stirred in little vagrant breaths of air.

There was a silver bowl of powder on the bureau; Sylvia powdered her nose, threw one pair of soft creamy gloves into the bureau drawer, took another; she opened her purse, looked into it absently. She was conscious of her heart beating.

Jerome was looking at the engine of the car when she went downstairs and out into the sweetness and heat of the garden.

"Sure you won't come, Jane?"

"Oh, I betten't," Jane said youthfully. "I've got Nitcha—and that paper of Leonardo da Vinci to finish."

Jerome, closing the hood, wiping his hands on his handkerchief, laughed as if to himself.

"I want to tell you he was a very important man!" Jane said reproachfully.

"Cut yourself?" Sylvia asked Jerome, looking at his hand.

"Scratch." He was wiping it busily.

"Carol, run upstairs and get Dad a clean handkerchief."

"I could drive," Sylvia suggested.

"No, I'll drive," he decided briefly, opening the car door. "Thanks, Bunny," he said to the child, giving her the oilstained handkerchief for the clean one.

"It's going to clear," said Jane of the low, warm, encompassing fog that was clinging close to the old house and the old trees. "It's wet!" she said, shaking the leaves of ivy that wrapped the fat gray pillars of the porch. "It's almost like a rain."

"It'll be fun down at the barn, won't it, Janey?" Carol said eagerly.

"Come on, Sylvia," Jerome urged her. Sylvia raised her eyes to his for a second, nodded, and got into the front of the car without speaking. A second later they

were driving down the long, gaunt avenue of poplars and eucalyptus to the yellow country road a mile from the house.

The fog was clinging softly, persistently, to the world; it rolled over the bare, flat, autumn-scented fields and lost itself in dwindling scarfs of mist in the stretches of woodland. Fences loomed mysteriously through it; sometimes an owl, perched stiffly on an upper rail, stared at them solemnly as they drove past.

The dust smelled sweet and aromatic, their motor wheels made two clean, upturned dry tracks in its wide dampness. There was an eerie stillness, a lonesome solitude, about the whole scene that seemed to seize upon Sylvia's heart. She could feel it beat; there was a strange, pressing confusion upon her senses.

A vagrant cow, grazing in the deep gully by the wayside, galloped awkwardly along the fence ahead of the car. They drove through little Los Antonios, silent and dripping in warm mid-morning stillness. Jerome went into the post office for the mail; Sylvia sat in the car looking at the disreputable motors that were moving like great dusty, cumbersome bugs up and down Main Street, and at girls loitering on the wide stone steps of the library, and at the majestic outlines of the new school, pink-tiled and porticoed and with grilled Spanish windows. Over everything the fog pressed its mysterious thickness; cottages rose into a sky of it, trees pointed vaguely upward into the mist, moving vehicles appeared suddenly and disappeared as suddenly.

Jerome came out with letters, magazines, papers, which he flung into the back of the car; he took his place beside his companion again, and they began to climb the winding hill road, the famous Los Antonios Grade, toward the east, between the stout warning poles of the fences, along the edge of the cliff and the yellow

meadows on which spreading oaks were dimly etched.

"You get a New York paper, Jerry?"

"Oh, yes, for the book reviews and the plays. Just to keep in touch. I never look at the other part."

"You never look at the other part? Don't you read the political scraps?"

"Oh, my God, no!"

Sylvia was silent awhile.

"But why, Jerry?"

"Because I hate all that bunk, I hate to remind myself of the sort of world we live in!" he said bitterly.

"Oh, Jerry," she pleaded, "it's not so bad!"

He drove on awhile, steering the car carefully on the slippery grade, sounding his horn when the throb of an approaching engine warned him that some other car was corkscrewing slowly down. Some of the cars that passed them had lighted yellow lights that shone, dully ringed with pink, as they came near, and took lumbering shapes, and stumbled by.

"It's awful!" Jerry persisted. "I don't want to read their lies. I don't want their reasons for more wars," he said more quietly. "I don't want to know that the wives of profiteers are giving dinner parties with diamond bracelets for favours while small, wet, bewildered kids are eating their pet dogs a few miles away! I'm sick of it, I'm afraid of it," he said. "I can't do anything about it, I'm helpless, I'm just an onlooker. I—why, damn it!" he broke off with a trembling, piteous note in his voice that Sylvia had never heard before, but that she strangely recognized as the voice of the Jerry Elsie had saved and comforted ten years before. "Damn it! I don't know who makes wars. Parliaments and congresses don't, kings and presidents don't—peoples don't—who does?"

"Do you know, Jerry," the woman said, in her cool

silver voice, after a pause, "do you know that I think that the very best thing you could do would be to get out of Los Antonios, here, come to one of the big cities, and see for yourself how little the world cares."

He glanced at her sharply, incredulity and a sort of curious interest in his face.

"How do you mean?"

"Why, the world could stop wars if it wanted to, Jerry!" Sylvia said serenely. "It doesn't want to. It likes wars. The very men who are going to starve and be gassed in the trenches of the next war—or rather, their fathers, for it's an old man's game—are going right on getting ready for it! They're all enjoying themselves, and their sons—getting off tremendous phrases about defence of their country, and preventing invasion—are enjoying it, too. And the women always like it. My dear boy, why do you take it so seriously? Nobody else does. Why, I know a woman in New York——" Sylvia said lazily, and stopped.

"Go on!" he said in an odd, forced tone.

"Well," she accelerated her pace, "I know this excellent middle-aged woman, prominent in the Red Cross, whose son died in camp of flu in the last war, and whose daughter-in-law was prematurely confined, as a consequence, and died when her baby came. But that doesn't affect this woman. She goes right on saying that the Berricourts have always given their sons to their country, and that she hopes that Toodles will be old enough to enlist in the next war. Their country!" Sylvia said, with a brief laugh. "Mrs. Berricourt is almost always in Europe, knocking everything American—prohibition and wage laws and democracy and everything else!" she finished, idly. "One wonders what she thinks her country *is!*"

"That's it," Jerry said briefly.

"But, my dear, you're a minority!" Sylvia assured him. "All the rest of the world is going along quite cheerfully. A motor car for every five persons in America, did you know that?"

"That's so," he said reluctantly.

"Look at the movies, Jerry, the motor cars, the beauty parlours, the wages a master mechanic gets, the radios and victrolas and jazzing, the gum and silk stockings and fur coats!" Sylvia laughed. "You ought to get out and see it, my dear—see the waste and the rush and the crazy spending on all sides—and you'd realize that the war is all over and forgotten, and that there's no poverty in America, no employment problem."

She lighted a cigarette, and was silent. After a few minutes Jerry said, "You do me good."

"It's the realization of the situation that does you good," Sylvia amended it. "Do you want one?"

"Thanks."

She lighted another cigarette, put it between his lips. Jerome smoked a few minutes in silence, flung it away, and with a great sigh said: "I suppose I'm a fool! It almost tipped my brain over, the war. There were times, for years afterward, when I could feel it tipping whenever I thought about it. But I suppose the majority has the right of way."

"And believe me," said Sylvia, "the majority got what it wanted. The masses," she rambled on, in that delicate crystal voice that made every word she said so oddly impressive, "the masses like revolutions. Women like to spout patriotism and run to meetings, instead of making the beds and buying spinach and prunes. Men adore giving up jobs for patriotic reasons, and telling their friends that they can't put even the wife and

kiddies before their country's honour. Why, thousands did it—thousands did it—and were made heroes! Hundreds of women managing small charities; women who had thought ten dollars, twenty dollars, quite a responsibility suddenly found themselves handling thousands. Of course they liked it! Women who had given their husbands five-dollar Christmas presents for years were suddenly buying them sleeping bags and wrist watches and tents and all sorts of things they never were going to use. It was like a big play—they loved it. They'll love the next. Don't worry about *them*."

"I know, I know," he said, with a sort of groan. "You're absolutely right!"

"Jerry," said Sylvia earnestly, "you're making a great mistake in not getting back into the world—right onto Broadway or Piccadilly, where you'd find out that even though hundreds—hundreds!—thousands," Sylvia corrected herself—"thousands of the finest men and women in the world are screaming Peace, are showing them all what blind, deluded—— I'm making quite a speech, Jerry, for me!" she laughed, and was silent.

"For God's sake go on," he said.

"Well!" She spread her white-gloved hands eloquently; obliquely, he caught the flash of her laughter. "That's about all. They love their—their bluffs, they like excitement and change, they won't be done out of their dear little wars! And it would be better for you to be out in the world, Jerry, to see for yourself—in the first place, how smug they are, how completely satisfied, even in Germany, even in France."

"My God, I suppose so!" he muttered heavily.

"But certainly they are! You ought to take Jane and Carol abroad, study it yourself, tell yourself that slaughter is the will of the majority."

"Sylvia—my God! You may be right," he said.

"Of *course* I'm right. No use wasting blood and tears on persons who see the whole thing as clearly as you do and think the other way!" the woman answered promptly. "And on the other hand," she added, "you'd see the minority—the almost invisible minority—that is fighting tooth and nail for sanity."

"God! I'd like to get into that," he said.

He gave her a quick glance, seeing as he did so her fully turned look of blank amazement.

"*You* get into it?" she demanded, staring.

"I'd die for it," he said simply.

"Jerry, you complete idiot!" Sylvia exclaimed. "Don't you know you're *in* it?"

"I?" he stammered, turning red. And she knew he was deeply pleased.

"You. Why, all three of your books are their textbooks!" Sylvia told him. "And especially this last one, *They Get Over It.*"

"They've panned that!" he said. But there was an incredulous sort of hope in his tone.

"You mean the reviewers? That doesn't matter," Sylvia said. "It's done just as much good as the others. And that, my dear," she added seriously, "is as much as any other one human being has done to end war forever, you can feel assured of that."

He was silent a long time.

"Sylvia, I think it would cure something—some sickness 'way down deep in my soul—if I could believe that!" he said.

"But that's what I'm telling you, Jerry, that's what I'm trying to make you *see*," she said patiently.

"How do you know?" he asked, driving on about the descending fog-shrouded curves, the splendid profile at which she glanced now and then, fine line of jaw and

high-bridged nose and clean-cut mouth, severe against the gray world.

"Oh, we discuss those things in the East, Jerry. Men come up for dinner. Those things matter, there, you know. Nobody discusses them here."

"You've an apartment?"

"I have an enchanting apartment on the West Side, over the park. It's unfashionable," said Sylvia, "but how you'd love it! On a blue winter night, with the stars as cold as diamonds, or in the spring, when everything's getting hotter and softer and greener every minute!

"Really—*really*," she said, "you ought to come on, for a year, or for two years; just steep yourself in people—human people who could so easily change things if they wanted to, and don't want to! Much, much better, Jerry, than to hide yourself away here imagining the world as a great, oppressed place where helpless sufferers are being jammed down into a pit!"

He gave a great laugh, his rare, delighted laugh.

"You're a darling!" he said.

"I mean it," said Sylvia. "You're physically in wonderful shape now. All you need is to clear up your mind a little!"

Jerome did not speak again until they reached Santa Lolita. But when they got there Sylvia realized that he was in wild spirits, and she knew that their chance talk on the subject so near to his heart was responsible for the mood.

They went to the grimy, dark courthouse that Sylvia said smelled "pencil dusty and spittoony," and she stood, fair-haired and earnest and nervous, before the old judge, and Jerry hovered close to her, ready to serve if he might.

Then they came out into the fog, which was slowly

lifting, and began the happy, desultory business of their other errands. The day was warming, yellow light was eating away the edges of the mist; a smouldering circle toward the southwest, looming heavily in fog, was the sun.

Sylvia and Jerome moved in an enchanted world; it was enough to be together. They did not express it, yet each was definitely conscious of it, and conscious of the other's feeling.

They stood at the counter in the dim, cool, oil-scented hardware store, and Sylvia clipped scissor blades together, and exclaimed over housekeeping devices: jam bottlers and camp stoves and cotpitters.

"Isn't it a delicious word—cotpitters? It sounds like some new, primitive sort of person, living in a forest!"

They went into the Saffron Sunshade and found paper dolls in glazed, enormous envelopes, and here Sylvia fingered little fat pottery bowls painted with yellow and red and black daisies, and bought an iron holder for Hong and incredible ruffled garters for Jane.

"Look at them, with the little china faces and frilled caps on them. Will you let her wear them?"

"They look feminine, for Jane," Jerome said, smiling.

"Aren't we having fun?"

"*Isn't* it nice!"

The car was in trouble; Jerome had to telephone Jane that they would be delayed for an hour or two.

"Oh, darling, what a bore! What can you do? Go to a movie," directed Jane.

"There's an awfully good one at the Golden West," he said.

"Is it foggy over there, Jerry?"

"It's clearing."

"Here, too. Joe's here. We've just got back to the house for lunch," said Jane's happy voice. "I wish you

could see what we've been doing to Nitcha! She's reformed."

Jerry and Sylvia walked out into Santa Lolita's main street, wandered past windows.

"It's one o'clock, Jerry. Why didn't we have lunch at that Sunshade place?"

"Because we're going to lunch somewhere else," Jerry said.

She knew that tone. The tone of a man to whose mind a plan involving a woman and unexpected and welcome felicity has suddenly presented itself.

"Oh!"

"Up at the Tavern," he explained. "It's about five miles out of town, in a ravine, over the creek. I just telephoned Jules. He's going to cook us a dinner."

"Oh! He sounds French."

"He is."

"Delicious!" she said. "I'm in the last stages of collapse."

"His man is to pick us up at the hotel. You'll love the place. I'd all but forgotten it."

"Oh, fun!" she said youthfully.

They went into the five-and-ten-cent store, and idled along the gay counters.

"Would you take a ring from me, Jerry? Do we know each other well enough for that?"

"Why, yes, I think so."

It was an imposing ring, with a broad green stone. Sylvia slipped it upon his big finger, tipped her head to squint at his hand, looked up at him questioningly.

"Now, what would you like?" he asked, as they sauntered on.

"Oh, Jerry, I can't have you spending your money on me, you dear mad boy!" Sylvia said.

"These little silk handkerchiefs——"

"Why, yes, this purplish one is charming," Sylvia exclaimed, tucking it down into her jacket pocket, glancing at it in satisfaction.

Jerry extended the dime.

"Fifteen cents," the saleswoman said impassively.

"Oh, I thought it was ten!" Sylvia exclaimed apologetically.

"That's *all* right—that's *all* right," Jerry droned a long sigh, as he fished in his pocket for the additional nickel.

"Look, Jerry, you can get lunch here. Chicken à la king, fifteen cents. That's reasonable, isn't it? In New York, at Pierre's—— Oh, and combination salad. And it looks very good."

"Jane and Carol love this place," the man said.

"Everybody does! Stockings—socks—how are you fixed for socks, Jerry?"

"Plenty, thanks."

"And embroideries! Look at the nice little aprons you can get to embroider! Well, they really come to about thirty," Sylvia tempered her enthusiasm. "Apron, ten; cotton, ten; flowers to appliqué, five—no, that's only twenty-five. That isn't much for a really nice apron," she conceded conscientiously. "Look what a nice big shiny casserole, Jerry. You could cook delicious things in that!"

He smiled down at her.

"You make even the five-and-ten thrilling!" he said.

"Life is thrilling," she said in a low voice as they went through the commonplace, cheap downtown street toward the commonplace, cheap hotel.

"Do you really think so, Sylvia?"

"Sometimes," she said, very low.

CHAPTER XII

THEY rattled in a muddy bus up to Jules's and had a table close to a railing on a redwood shadowed porch above a boiling creek. The sun was out in full power now, and it was deliciously warm and sweet among the leaves and brown branches. Nobody else was on the porch.

The creek ran on rocks and swirled into deep, jade-green pools above which dragonflies poised and flitted, and upon which droves of agile little water skaters jerked to and fro. Opposite, it broadened to a wide, cobbled shingle on which winter freshets had left tangles of branches, snags, and water weeds, bleached as white as bones in the hot sun. The water made a constant, pleasant, sleepy noise, and sometimes a jay or a chipmunk alighted scolding on the shingle for a moment or two. Otherwise the fragrant autumn world was very still.

Jules brought them a great pot of soup swimming with all the vegetables that ever were in the world, an omelette, broiled chicken, his own specialty of scraped corn, coffee, cheese, a solid guava preserve he called "Portugaise," and fried potatoes so dry, so palely crisp and brown, that Sylvia could raise them in her finger tips. She said that she had never in the course of her life eaten such food; Jerome said that he had forgotten how good the old boy's dinners were.

It was almost two o'clock before they began their meal; they sat long over it, with the green layers of the

redwood branches spreading all about them and the water twinkling over the rocks in shade and sunshine below. Through the cathedral vistas of the redwood trees, stretching away up the hill behind the hotel, Sylvia could look far, far into the forest and see little columns of midges spinning up and down in the sunshiny spaces, and see the gray-plumed squirrels come down the swaying branches and pause and listen and whisk away again.

". . . Then you were in love with Garth when you married him, Sylvia?"

"Oh, yes! It's the thing to say that you weren't. But as I remember it, I was. I was mad about him."

"The thing to say that you weren't in love with your husband?" Jerry had his old air, she remembered it from years ago, of being uninstructed in the ways of women, of turning their most innocent revelations over and over, with a simple sort of relish. Sylvia could see that this was a surprise to him, a most interesting suggestion.

"You're supposed to have been tricked into marriage—you're supposed not to have known what you were doing," she explained, with the air of resolute restraint that was apt to characterize her allusions to Garth.

"I see," he said, immensely diverted, impressed. "But you," he said; "you say you were?"

"Everyone is!" Sylvia insisted with amused impatience. "No girl—rich or poor, fifteen or thirty-five—marries for any but one reason: because she wants to. Later, when you become completely disillusioned, when you realize that that first appeal wasn't enough, that there wasn't anything behind it, then it's always a sort of—well, saving of one's face, to plead that you never really cared."

"Where'd you meet him, Sylvia?"

"Oh, with the crowd I knew, in Boston and Princeton, and New York. Garth was everywhere. All the girls liked him—he was the sheik of his own particular time. And I remember being frightfully anxious for fear a girl named Anna Moore would get him." Sylvia laughed ruefully, shook her beautiful head slowly from side to side. "If she *had!*" she said drily.

"How long did it last?" Jerome asked slowly, again with his air of exploring fascinating and unfamiliar regions.

"Our marriage?"

"No; the happiness of it."

"Oh, almost not at all. Garth simply—wasn't there. Behind the beauty and the gallant manner there simply wasn't anybody. Nothing to appeal to, nobody who thought or read or felt. It was the feeling that was hardest to spare," Sylvia said slowly. "He feels nothing, at least for a woman like me. For this little peasant he is so happy with now, he really may; it's probably that her intellect and his are pretty similar. Food, sleep, clothes, flattery, sunshine, golf—that's all Garth knows. He doesn't want anything more, he is quite incapable of understanding it. His father is president of a firm of engineers; there's plenty of money, he'll always have jobs. And there will always be some chief engineer or obliging manager wherever he goes to take all the responsibility and wriggle him through somehow."

Her lovely, indifferent voice stopped, she continued to lean her elbows on the table; now she raised her eyes to Jerome's, and a slow, half-amused, half-tragic smile shone through them like the star in a gray sapphire, deepening, scintillating—gone.

They were silent; Jerome's hand, holding his cigarette, trembled.

"What an hour, Sylvia," he said, out of a long silence.

Her eyes returned to his again from the green forest.

"Memorable—in a lifetime."

She stretched her hand, flung crumbs; the trout shot from under the overhanging banks of the pool, whirled in a flurry of disturbed water, were gone again.

"They're tiny things. What would one of them weigh, Jerry?"

"The—the—the trout?" He was stammering.

Her constrained eyes were tied to his, trapped by them, helpless.

"The—the fish," she said thickly, dragging her gaze away, clearing her throat.

"Not worth catching, yet. We get them up in the mountains later on," Jerry said, talking like a man in a dream, hardly conscious of what he was saying. Did this make sense? What were they talking about? "They run about five to the pound," he said.

"Oh," she said vaguely, looking down at the stream again.

He was alone with her, lunching and talking. He was alone with her, lunching and talking. And she was incomparably lovely, soft, bewilderingly white, fair, gentle, and sweet.

Sylvia wore a rough little sports suit and a small rough hat. But her blouse was of the finest batiste, plain and sheer as a handkerchief falling in a fragrant cascade of frills away from her white throat. Her skin was like the firm, deep white of daisy petals; the man wondered if flesh like Sylvia's wasn't white clear through, down to the beautiful, delicate structure of her bones. She was as white as a princess out of a Norse fairy tale—diamond-white, snow-white. The gold that drifted across her forehead was white gold, but her eyebrows were dark and cloudy, and her eyes were set in circles of pale umber—

yellow-gray eyes, long-lashed, pulsating, glowing and welling with light.

While they talked one of her fine, thin, nervous hands, idle on the coarse clean tablecloth, played with a small enamelled match case, a tiny square that matched her vanity boxes and purse. It shone between her white fingers as red as blood; now and then she raised her eyes from it, and their full, thoughtful look met Jerome's watchful ones.

He hardly moved; indeed, they were both almost motionless as they murmured together.

After a while Sylvia stood up, and Jerome stood up slowly, too, and they turned their backs upon the little porch table among the branches, with the creek whispering and tinkling beneath it, and went into the shabby dim little hotel lobby. Jerome paid the bill, and the omnibus began to roar again, and presently they were rocking down through the woods to Santa Lolita.

The car was ready; the man wiped it obsequiously with an oily rag. He had done everything that could be done for it, with oil and gas and water and air, and it was all right again. Sylvia smiled at him from the front seat, and Jerome thanked him. They were very silent on the drive home.

The woman was in fact conscious of a sort of weary reaction. She did not think Jerome so remarkable, after all; he was just a tall, fair man in tweeds anchored to an adoring, blunt, much younger wife and a small girl at the lengthening, gawky age. Sylvia felt ashamed of the strange emotions she had had on the shady porch of Jules's an hour ago; everything was all right again now; she felt normal and comfortable, and a little bored. She was conscious even of a faint distaste for Jerome's company, in which she had been betrayed into the old schoolgirl flutter of an affair.

"I hope Joe's coming over for supper; it's Saturday, and he usually comes on Saturdays," she said.

"Oh, I hope he does," Jerome answered interestedly. Sylvia resented his quick response; he was feeling a little ashamed and conscious, too, was he?

They turned into the long drive to Storm House; the shafts of sunset smote them full upon their faces and irradiated the old house in streamers of dazzling gold. Windmill, roofs, barns, and trees all swam together in a blinding blur.

Jane and Carol, irreproachably fresh and clean, rushed out of the front door to meet them.

"Oh, Jerry—oh, Sylvia—what a horrible day you've had!" Jane exclaimed. "It's been so divine here—one of the most wonderful days we ever had! Joe came over to lunch, and we all went cruising along the shore—miles! We walked past the light, Jerry. And you poor things were wandering around Santa Lolita. Was it hot? Was there anything at all to do?"

"I had a bright thought," said Jerome. "We went up to Jules's for lunch."

"Oh, is he back? He was going to France. Ah, well, that helped!" Jane said.

She looked young and hard and charming, cheeks rosy under an even coat of tan, blue eyes shining, dark hair brushed freshly, crisply into place. She wore a lavender cotton gown that Sylvia thought especially becoming to the flat, straight, boyish figure.

"Get comfortable, Sylvia, and come down to the terrace. Joe's there!"

She and Carol turned toward the garden gate; Sylvia went into the hallway, which seemed close and dark, and Jerome followed her.

"That was a wonderful little luncheon of ours, wasn't it, Silver?" he said in a low, tender voice.

Something sentimental, something too sweet in his tone suddenly antagonized her; Sylvia felt cold and unresponsive, and as if her spirit were a thousand miles away.

He was standing a few feet below her as she started to mount the stairs; she looked down at him, a nice, middle-aged family man, smiling and tousled. His eyes were full of a deep significance, and she felt annoyed, annoyed with herself, who had given way to to-day's mood of weakness, and with him, who was taking advantage of it. She didn't want any sentimental philandering with Jerome Delafield!

"We must do it again," she said haughtily, lifelessly.

"It'll be our little special lunching place forever, won't it, Silver?" Jerry asked, coming nearer.

She hated him, hated herself, hated the cheapness of it. What she must answer must be in the tawdry, vulgar phrasing of the flirtatious married woman.

"Oh, come now—not so fast, you bad boy! What about your wife?"

She did not say it in quite those words, but she said something, and ran upstairs, and went into her room.

"Common! Common! Common!" she panted contemptuously, tearing off her outer garments, pushing her disordered hair away from her hot face with both hands. Sylvia Bellamy, so fine and reserved and cool, so superior to poor Garth, with his passionate impulsiveness and weakness, Sylvia, succumbing to propinquity; to the nearest man's attentions just because he was the nearest man!

Usually she found herself in the glass fresh and proud and level-eyed. To-day's reflection, the fast-breathing woman in the slim brief undergarments, with a drift of white-gold hair loosened about her most unwontedly flushed face, did not look like Sylvia at all.

"You common woman!" she said, half aloud, her eyes narrowed to slits, her mouth sneering. "You vulgar, vain, weak, common woman!"

She bathed, brushed her hair into its usual severe gold turban about her white forehead, put on a loose soft little blue silk gown, glanced scornfully at chains and rings.

"That settles *you*, my dear Jerome Delafield," she said, as she dressed. "I've seen this thing coming in time, and it's *over*, my dear boy! 'Silver,' indeed! I wonder if I've had a beau from kindergarten days who hasn't called me 'Silver'! No. This is over. I like him—or I did. But how I hate them when they get that tender, brooding, heavenly smile in their eyes! One likes a man as he is. Funny that *all* of them—all of them!—change the minute they imagine one likes them and try to be something quite different. And when they change one forgets how nice they used to be."

She glanced at herself in the mirror, a slim, tall woman with a sweep of bright hair over her sombre eyes and a white throat rising from the neck of her plain blue gown.

"Enter Mr. Joseph Chickering," said Sylvia. "I'll do even that. But I won't let Jerome Delafield hurt himself—on *me*."

When she reached the terrace only Jane, Carol, and Joe Chickering were there; the tea was cooling on its tray, and all three were busy with the inevitable cross-word puzzle.

"Sylvia, what's a six-letter word for 'tap'?"

"Nudge," Sylvia said, taking a long chair, stretching herself at length, crossing her slim ankles, and looking up into the thick cottony leaves of the fig tree with a long, deep, relieved sigh.

"That's only five."

"A pressure, a greeting, a blow," Joe muttered.

"It *can't* end with 't'," Jane was murmuring, erasing doubtfully.

"It couldn't be 'faucet,' I suppose?" Sylvia asked idly.

"Faucet! Oh, yes, and that's the 'f' of the feeder—'one who nourishes'—Joe!" Jane exclaimed delightedly. "Oh, now we've got it!"

They toiled on, and Sylvia lay still, letting the healing sweetness of the afternoon saturate her, soul and body, letting her mind lie idle, not thinking, hardly conscious that she existed at all. Presently she was aware that Jerry had come down from the house, and was in his favourite basket chair near her own. But she did not move, not even her eyes, in his direction.

"What on earth came over me to-day?" she asked herself. "What possessed me to sit there at that luncheon table—talking that way?"

Jerome spoke casually to Carol, and Sylvia's heart turned over. She tasted salt water in her mouth, and lay back, breathing a little hard, feeling suddenly weak.

"Look out there, darling. Don't bump Jane's elbow."

Then Jane's pleasant voice, with the gruff little boyish note in it.

"You're tired to death, Jerry."

"I'm not tired at all. We had a grand day; we brought you all presents. Well," Jerry amended it, "I'm just tired enough to think this is fun."

"What about the coffee pot?"

"They hadn't anything larger than two and a half quarts—ten cups. And I'll be darned," said Jerry's drawling accents, "if I could remember if you said that was large enough! So I have to telephone."

"Two and a half quarts! You idiot, I said two quarts,

or even a little less. Oh, Jerry, I hoped you'd bring it!"

That he, the Delafield of *They Get Over It*, one of the most sophisticated voices in modern letters, should be delivery boy for a country hardware store, Sylvia thought. Oh, well, if he was happy!

Jerry straightened in his chair, stood up, bent over the tea table, took the brimming cup from his wife and brought it slowly, steadily, like a small careful boy, to Sylvia. Sylvia looked up to smile pleasantly at this much-married, domestic, contented man, and found herself lost again, at sea, in the dark, the tempest roaring about her, the waters rising over her head.

"No, dear, no bread and butter. Thanks, dear," she said thickly to Carol. She lay there trembling, automatically stirring her cup, her eyes wide with a sort of terror, her gaze fixed on the softly dimmed blue horizon. "My God," prayed Sylvia in her terrified soul. "What shall I do?"

Everything went on as usual, on and on and on. They scattered at six, in heavy warm dusk, to freshen for dinner, and gathered in the drawing room just before the meal was announced. Just as usual. Just as usual.

Sylvia wore a slim, almost transparent black velvet and a string of what she called grocery pearls. She came downstairs to find Joe Chickering stretched in a chair before the fire, and Jerome, who had just lighted it, standing with his back to the strengthening blaze. The night had shut down cold and windy, the halls were draughty, and the cheering glow of lamplight and firelight was infinitely inviting.

Carol had gone to bed; Jane came downstairs a few minutes after seven, breathless and laughing and with a dewy sort of brightness in her eyes, after the usual tussle with Carol's bath and prayers and bed and the darkness of Carol's room. She wore a white Chinese silk

gown, as plain and straight as a tube, with jade beads. And on her small blunt hand was a band of jade set in an old red-gold Chinese ring.

"Do you see your birthday present, Jeremiah?"

"Pretty on you, dear," Jerry said, smiling his own peculiarly bright smile.

He went back to his talk with Joe; the women were almost silent.

Just as usual Too Fah came pattering to the door to announce dinner, at quarter-past seven, and they all went out to the clear soup with the strange smooth egg ribbons in it, and the delicate great mound of ham bristling with cloves, and the round white biscuit.

"What's on the sweet potatoes, Jenny?"

"Marshmallows. Are they good?"

"Why, aren't you taking any, dear?"

"Jerry, darling, I'm getting so fat!"

"*You* fat!" He picked up the big carver again; Joe had sent his plate back for a sliver—just a scrap more. Sylvia watched Jerome's big, fine hands as he sliced the toppling piece. She had a moment of comfort, a moment in which she felt warmly reassured. There was no woman alive who would not love that big, kind, handsome man, with his anxious intelligent forehead and his keen, deep-set gray eyes, and the way his old coat rode his broad shoulders, and the way his wrist turned as he carved. Jerome Delafield—who had written *Postscript to a Battle*, and *Halloway Enlists*, and *They Get Over It*.

She was not the only one. She was not to be accused of any exceptional weakness or wickedness. It was the man who was really—and quite innocently—to blame.

"No little girl to-night?"

"Jerry, she was exhausted. We really had a terrific day. She made a full meal of tea, and I carried her up some animal crackers and milk half an hour ago. It was

entirely her own idea," Jane smiled at the table. "Not punishment, this time," she reassured them.

"Is that the way you punish her, Jane?" Joe asked.

"Well—but I never have to punish her, now," Jane said, brightly. "When she was much smaller, sometimes, she used to get so tired she would be naughty."

"How about the night, just after we were married, when she pulled my hair?" Jerome asked.

"She didn't, Jerry!" Jane asserted quickly. "He teased her. I don't know what got into him," she said to the others. "He never teases. But that night—well, he was just *wild!*" Jane broke off seriously. "Yes, you were, Jerry, you know you were. And when he picked her up to carry her off to bed, she suddenly caught both her little hands tight in his hair—and tugged!"

"That was when you took the horsewhip to her?" Joe asked, moving his eyes to Jerome.

"He?" Jane scoffed. "He's never touched her in his life! He'd *never* punish her."

And Sylvia, listening, her mood alternately cold and despairing and warm and exquisitely reminiscent, felt her first pang of jealousy. She hardly recognized it, for it was entirely unprecedented. But she knew, suddenly, that she hated to hear Jane talk like that, hated to hear her happy chatter of intimate hours with Jerome: "when we were first married—he never does this—he never forgets that."

Everything as usual; that night, and the next day. But only on the surface. Underneath Sylvia's feet she felt the blackness of the pit.

She and Jerome hardly looked at each other, hardly spoke to each other. Yet Sylvia felt life thrilling through her like a wild, sweet wind through the strings of a harp; everything was significant, the tiniest thing, the least important, every instant shone and glowed and throbbed

with ecstasy and pain and glory and fear and shame and pride.

The thought of that luncheon talk at Jules's was incessantly with her. She did not anticipate many such wonderful hours with Jerome; obviously they could not, *must* not, be. But she knew that she must have one more—one more leisurely talk, murmuring, looking up into his eyes, so close and intent and serious, looking down at her own fingers, murmuring again.

Just one. Sylvia wondered if he, too, were not thinking about it, planning about it, trying all day long to fit it in between Jane's casual, unsuspecting demands and Carol's importunities and the decorous duties of his own life as a husband and father, a householder, a writer of distinction.

When they had opportunity for an unobserved word on the Sunday morning, Jerome said, "Lovely little party yesterday, Sylvia."

"Wasn't it?" Sylvia answered, with a glimpse of her suddenly illumined amber eyes.

"I keep thinking about it," Jerome confessed simply.

"I, too."

And she watched him, furtively, during the next half hour, to see if he wanted to add something more. But Jerome appeared to be quite the happy, serene, busy man he had been a week ago.

A profound restlessness seized Sylvia, and during Sunday afternoon she felt almost ill. Her skin was dry, her eyes blazing; she could settle to nothing, take interest in nothing. She was conscious of a burning self-contempt, she resented Jane, she was bored by the child and by the eternally present Joe Chickering.

They went down to the beach in a blowing soft autumn fog that shut off the little half-circle of sand upon which they walked, like a small, enclosed stage. Jane,

Carol, Joe, Jerome, and the airedales all appeared to be in wild spirits; only Sylvia felt heavy and stupid and out of key. Moments of utter apathy would be succeeded by moods of wild exhilaration. She felt herself the prey of any chance emotion that the surging confusion of her memories and her senses brought to her.

Presently they all rested on the rocks, Joe smoking, Sylvia smoking, Carol plastered flat on dry sand marking little courses for sand fleas with a stick, Jerome on a ledge of age-old stone that made a natural seat, and Jane beside him, half supported by his arm, her head resting against the shoulder of his rough coat. She was silent, happy; now and then she turned her face so that it touched Jerome's, and rubbed her temple against his chin. And when she did that Sylvia felt an odd plunge at her heart, jealousy and pain and pity all in one.

"If I knew that he cared—if I only knew that," Sylvia thought, "I would go away to-morrow! I wouldn't hurt her—I wouldn't break it up—all this. But does he care?"

He was not looking at her; she fancied he was sedulously avoiding her, and was pleased with the idea. If he was, then he was feeling something of what she was feeling. And that, Sylvia told her disturbed and feverish soul, was all she wanted to know. She must know that, and then she could go away, and he would forget, and she would forget it all.

"Warm enough, Jenny dear?" his voice said, kindly.

"Oh, boiling! This sweater looks thin, but——"

How sure Jane was of him! How confidently she turned that brown small face of hers, with its lighting of bright blue eyes and its happy flush creeping up through the summer tan! Just a nice, capable, contented child, that was Jane. And she supposed herself entirely capable of

holding at her side, forever, this extraordinary man.

The day, endless to Sylvia, wore along to night. It was Sunday evening. Jerry never worked then; Hong and Too Fah always left them a cold supper and disappeared into the malodorous streets of Los Antonios' Chinatown for mysterious revels of their own; the family at Storm House took care of itself. Jane made chocolate, Carol whipped cream, Jerome sat on the edge of the kitchen table, begging to be made useful. To-night Joe was going to do something brilliant with cheese, olives, pepper, and tabasco; Sylvia said that if everyone would leave her alone, and keep miles away, and give her all the spoons, forks, plates, and things she needed, she would make zaballone. She hadn't made it for a long time, but she rather thought it would come back to her as she went along.

Exquisite she looked, too, in one of Jane's blue aprons, with her drift of glittering soft hair slightly disordered, and her slender daisy-white arms bared, gallantly attacking eggshells, yellow bowls, and sugar scoop.

"I'll tell you what, Sylvia," said Joe; "you look like an advertisement for a gas stove. 'Why Drudge With Coal?' ought to be printed under you."

"Joe, there are a lot of cold potatoes here, and all sorts of things," Jane observed, taking her head out of the big white enamelled icebox. "Would you eat potatoes if I fried them? Would you, Jerry?"

They all declined the potatoes. If they ate half of what was already in sight . . .!

"Would anyone like jam? Carol, darling, put this jar on the table," Jane went on busily.

"I don't know how it is," said Sylvia, nonplussed, pushing a fallen lock of hair off her white forehead with

the back of a slender wrist, "but I seem to need another egg beater. Have we another? And a casserole, Joe. Hook me down that nice little blue one."

Jerry came over to the pastry table to stand beside her; she knew it—she knew it—in every thrilling fibre of her being, although she did not turn her head.

"Is this going to be fit to eat?" he asked amusedly.

Sylvia looked up at him, and found herself entirely unable to speak. She looked down again, and the colour flooded under her white skin like a swift tide, and flamed on the curve of cheek that Jerome could see.

They were both silent; Sylvia whirred the egg beater with a trembling hand; the whipped whites rose smooth and stiff in the bowl.

"I'd like so much to have—just one more short—talk with you," Jerome said clearly, very low. They two, at the moment, were alone in the kitchen.

He did care! He did care! The knowledge sang in her heart like a heady wine, the miseries of the whole long day dropped like a stifling cocoon, and Sylvia felt her butterfly wings rise glorious and strong into the sunshine about her.

"To-morrow?" she breathed.

"Perhaps. I have something hard to say," Jerome said, unsmiling.

There was a flash of quick understanding and sympathy in her answering eyes.

"I, too," she said gravely. But never did any unpromising prospect fill a woman's heart with such pulsating delight. "And then," she said, "I'm going away. In a day or two."

He made no protest, except to raise his eyebrows slightly and shrug his shoulders.

"I thought of that," he said slowly. "I suppose so."

"Come on, everybody!" Jane called, from the dining room.

"Listen!" said Joe, agitatedly, appearing in the pantry arch, "if this is ever going to be eaten it has to be eaten *now*."

"This has to wait anyway!" Sylvia abandoned her undertaking and they all sat down informally to the incongruously loaded table in the dining room. Jane leaned across it, passing things, straightening pepper and salt, stirring the mustard vigorously with its glass spoon. Carol, fascinated, watched the whipped cream in her cup settle into a rich white film, entirely concealing the chocolate beneath. Joe was only concerned that the cheese mixture, cooling upon its toast, should be instantly eaten.

And presently it was to be seen that Sylvia was in extraordinary beauty and high spirits.

"I was afraid you had a headache," said Jane. "You were so quiet this afternoon."

"I did feel rather tottery to-day for no reason at all," said Sylvia. "But to-night I am simply on my toes!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE quivering, the fluctuations between cold apathy and wildest excitement continued for one more day, and on Monday night she knew she could bear it no longer. Just one more talk with Jerome, even a short one, and then she would go away.

Sylvia had that day told Jane that there had been annoying complications in the divorce matter; she had been advised to go straight up to Nevada and spend six months there and have it settled legally, finally, once and for all. Jane said, affectionate arm about Sylvia's waist, that she thought Sylvia was wonderfully generous to do that for Garth and his new little peasant wife-to-be. Sylvia had won Jane's shy, youthful, rather inaccessible heart completely; Jane was boyishly, awkwardly demonstrative with Sylvia, as she was with no other human being except her idolized own, Jerry and Carol.

That night, Monday night, marked the turning point in the whole affair. For Jane was tired, and when Jerry went off to his cabin to work after dinner, she decided to go to bed.

Sylvia apparently decided the same thing; she and Jane wandered to and fro between each other's rooms as they undressed and brushed their hair. At half-past nine Jane was sound asleep; Sylvia knew it, for she went to Jane's door, left ajar, and discovered her with her bedside light shining upon her closed eyes.

"You don't want this," Sylvia said maternally, pulling out an extra pillow, lowering Jane's small heavy form gently. Jane opened smiling, sleep-drunk eyes, collapsed luxuriously, and incoherently apologized as the light went out.

Sylvia went back to her room and sat there reading. Her heart was beating hard; now and then she looked off her book. Even when her eyes were upon it she saw nothing.

The room was quiet in the autumn evening; Sylvia's fat airtight stove had warmed it delightfully, her lamp sent a softly quivering circle of light upon the rug. There were late roses in a glass bowl on her table; the green stems in the crystal water as lovely as the pale yellow and deep pink blossoms.

This room had been Jane's room years ago, when she had come as Carol's governess to Storm House; all Sylvia needed to do, to gain the garden, was cross the old sleeping porch and descend the narrow outside stairs.

She had not completely undressed to-night. She was wearing a Chinese costume, as Jane often did, of trousers and long frogged coat of pale green brocade. Over it, for warmth, Sylvia had on a loose soft Japanese crape jacket. Her bare feet were in Oriental slippers. So robing herself, an hour ago, she had thought that if Jerry came back to the house earlier than usual, and happened to see, as he mounted the stairs, the light still shining through her door, they might go downstairs to finish the fire together and have their talk, after all.

But suppose, instead of waiting for him, she went to him? She was far more fully covered, after all, than any girl in a bathing suit, than any girl at a dance, nowadays. And if the dress was a trifle informal, at least it would be nothing new to him; she and Jane wore what

they liked in the heavenly privacy and easiness of Storm House.

An exquisite excitement ran through her, and she was shaken only by the fear that she might be too late. It was ten o'clock; he might be leaving the cabin at any instant.

As swift as light she put out her lamp, crossed the room by a faint glimmer of moonlight, and was noiselessly descending the porch stairs. The house had seemed cool and autumny to-night; there had been fires upstairs and downstairs.

But outside there was a glory of shining silver, and the air was soft and warm. The strange radiance of the moon dripped through the branches of the trees and lay in pools and slivers on the mysterious velvet blackness of the garden; a wandering sweetness was abroad, the sweetness of dew-wet cooling fields, and flowers beginning to breathe again after the dry, hot day.

Sylvia moved in little quick rushes from the inky shadows of the laurels to the protection of the bushy marguerite bushes, and so gained the little ravine that lay between the house and the towering black mound that was Bowers Hill. Jerry's cabin was only a hundred yards up the steep rise; Sylvia followed a winding trail that was propped by narrow redwood poles. Now she was facing the rounded, furry tops of the eucalyptus and pines close to the house that were steeped in moonlight, now turning back to catch glimpses, between stout oak trunks, of the shimmering wide dim grayness that was the sea.

Jerry's lamp was still lighted; he was typewriting when she opened the door. He turned about sharply, and she stepped inside and softly pushed the glass-paned panels shut behind him.

"Hello!" he said pleasedly, rumpling afresh his al-

ready rumpled hair, jumping up to indicate the wide-armed chair that was opposite his own. And sitting down again, facing her across the flat-topped desk, he smiled hospitably. "You came just in time—I was stopping," he said.

"You were writing," she said guiltily.

"No, just finished—honestly. Well, hello!" Jerry said again, as she looked about the rough rafters and at the jumbled pictures and books interestedly. "You haven't been up here for a long time," he said.

"I came up the day after I got here, and then Jane and I came up hunting for a publicity photograph to send some magazine," she said.

"Jane coming?" Jerry said, jerking his handsome, slightly dishevelled head toward the door.

"Asleep," Sylvia answered simply.

"And you felt wakeful?"

"Frightfully wakeful. It's a divine night—it lured me out!" Sylvia said untruthfully. Untruthfully, because suddenly the whole occasion seemed to have gone flat; there seemed to be no romance, no mystery about it: no reason in the world why she should not be sitting here, in her square pajamas and Japanese coat, talking to Jerry who looked weary and sleepy and good-natured, and not at all surprised.

And also there seemed to be no reason why she *should* be here. Sylvia felt ashamed of herself, flying through the black dark, thrilling with all the day's accumulated hopes and fears and desires, rushing in upon this quiet, pleased, unsurprised man, who was presently going to escort her decorously to the house and glance in upon his sleeping little girl before he entered the room in which his wife was also asleep.

She had thought confusedly, as she sat reading in her room half an hour before, that she would tell Jerry she

was going away—going to Nevada, where a brief stay would make possible a perfectly matter-of-fact divorce; that she would cover her late visit with this plan, as an excuse.

But now that all sounded, even in her thoughts, as palpably artificial and insincere as—well, as it really was. Why should she hurry up to the cabin, at ten o'clock at night, to tell him this?

"I wasn't even sure you were here until I saw your light," she said, casually conversational.

"Where'd you go? Down toward the beach?"

She nodded. Jerry jerked his head toward the south, where the hill rose sharply above the cabin, heavily wooded with oak and bay and madrone trees, and without a flicker of light anywhere to-night, except when the moonlight poured down through the crooked branches.

"Deer in there," he said, "and bobcats, and an occasional skunk. Don't ever try Bowers Hill at night!"

"Is that where the owl is?" Sylvia asked, turning innocent eyes toward the window. "The one who sounds like a hinge grating every night?"

"No. That old fellow's in the windmill oak." Jerome pushed a desk drawer in, put a crystal paperweight on a tray of letters, and stood up, dropping his pipe into his pocket. "I'm going to call it a day," he said amiably.

Sylvia felt the colour burning in her cheeks. She got up, too.

"Do I snap off this light?"

"Yep. And this one." There was only a small, dim lamp left, near the door. As he came toward it, and toward her, Sylvia took an irresolute step in his direction, and put both hands on his coat collar.

"Just tell me," she said resolutely. "Are you cross at me about something?"

He stood still, looking down, but not at her.

"No—of course not!" he said, very low.

"If I was silly at Jules's, on Saturday," she said, "I'm so sorry. I've been sorry ever since!"

Her hands still held him; he put his own hands gently on her shoulders.

"I don't think you were silly," he said with a little effort, clearing his throat. A faint accent on the fourth word thrilled her suddenly.

"Jerry," Sylvia breathed, looking up at him, her soft drift of hair so close that he could smell its fragrance, her luminous eyes, like tawny star sapphires, shining strangely in the dim light of the one lamp, "I'm sorry that it had to be this way. I'm awfully sorry. You know—Jane told you, didn't she?—that I'm going away. It—this—knowing you, has been the happiest time in my life. And I'm running away from it. So don't be cross at me!"

His hands moved across her shoulders and held her in a vise. His face came down close to hers. Without a word, his mouth closed upon her own.

Sylvia went away from Storm House four days later. She was going to San Francisco, and then to Nevada, and she had friends in Berkeley to see, and altogether she appeared mondaine again to Jane, not at all the lazy, happy, idle Sylvia who had announced herself as so thoroughly done with the world a few weeks before.

"I thought you might take that little Spanish house near Joe's, Sylvia, when you got tired of us!" Jane said reproachfully.

"Tired of you!" Sylvia, who appeared nervous and restless, but certainly not tired, answered affectionately. "No, but I'm like that, Jane," she said. "I get sudden

notions. I'll write you every other day, and when my little business is finished, maybe you'll let me come down again."

"Oh, you're a member of the family!" Jane assured her. "Joe here would be only too proud to have you smile on him, anyway," added Jane. "Come back and marry Joe!"

"Say the word," Joe responded dutifully. Sylvia's eyes met his for a flashing glance, and she knew that Joe knew.

"You may see Jerry in San Francisco," Jane went on, casting about for last-minute topics. "Some miserable old publisher is going to be there—Herbert Liebermond —some such name."

"Herbert Liebermond," Sylvia repeated. She had composed this name herself, a day or two earlier, to use in telegrams to Jerome, should they be necessary. She had explained to him that *lieber* meant "love," and *mond*, moon. "And should you come, too, Jane?" she asked.

"Oh, I doubt it!" said Jane. "I'm going up later with Carol, to have her tonsils out," she added, "and see my grandmother and everyone. But this would be just a business trip; Jerry would only be away one night. He'd go up in the train—it's an awful trip."

"I hate to go!" Sylvia said regretfully, as Jerry and the motor car came about the drive. "We've been so happy."

"Come back then, you golden-headed siren," said Jane.

Jerry was driving the car; Sylvia got in next to him, Jane and Carol on the back seat. An imploring airedale was dragged in at the last moment by Carol. Joe followed in his own car.

At the station there were kisses, promises, farewells.

Jerry, who was white and quiet, kissed Sylvia with the rest, a brief unsmiling kiss; Carol dragged her head down, tipped her hat.

"Jerry, are you going to forgive me for loving you?"

They were safe behind a mountain of baggage. Joe was at the other end of the platform with Carol, tinkering with his car. Jane was at the ticket office, trying to find out why the train was ten minutes late.

Jerry looked down at her, an infinite weariness and regret and gentleness in his face.

"It's only myself I can't forgive, Sylvia."

"Forget, then," she said sadly, wistfully, looking away.

"That's what I must do," he said.

"I'll not forget," said Sylvia. "Never, never, never. I'd rather be unhappy—miserably, terribly unhappy, than forget."

Jerome said nothing. His wretched eyes looked beyond her into far space.

The train roared in, Sylvia climbed up the high steps and stood for a moment smiling down at them, a slender, tall figure, with bright hair swept off an earnest face and deepset eyes full of affection and the smiles and the sorrow of parting. She wore a soft brown hat, a soft, flexible, belted brown coat, and a loose great fur of brown splashed with white and black. Her buckled shoes and her loose white gloves were perfection; the frill that Jerome had watched at Jules's a week ago spilled its soft, sheer cascade through her coat opening.

Jerome, Joe, little Carol, and Jane watched the train out of sight; a great emptiness seemed to fall upon quiet, ugly little Los Antonios, there was a queer blankness about the world.

They asked Joe home to lunch, but Joe could not come, so the Delafields jammed themselves, all three,

into the front seat of their muddy car and went sadly back, talking about Sylvia and what vitality, beauty, and charm she brought into everything she touched.

Storm House seemed queer and silent; Jane, going in, had a moment of utter panic. What on earth had she and Carol and Jerome done to amuse themselves, to fill the hours, before Sylvia came?

"Are you working this afternoon, Jerry?"

"I'm going to get at my mail."

"How about the film in Santa Lolita to-night? Would you like it? We shall be perfectly lost for a day or two."

"Suppose——" Santa Lolita said nothing but "Sylvia" to him; he could hardly speak coherently of anything else for thinking of her there. "Suppose we wait and see how we feel after dinner, Jane."

"All right." The house, thought Jane, making herself errands up- and downstairs, was reduced to mere tables and chairs and walls, a dreadful thing to happen to any house. No more ridiculous bridge in the evenings with Sylvia and Joe, no more morning chatter on the terrace while she and Sylvia dried their salty hair and fussed with tiny scissors and fingernails, no more wonderful tea hours under the morbidly scented heavy foliage of the fig tree. Sylvia and the light that seemed to cling to her golden head were gone.

Jane looked into the room Sylvia had occupied; there were fine gold hairpins scattered with the spilled powder on the bureau, rumpled wet towels on the bathroom floor, late roses, yellow and red, wilting in their bowl. The windows were wide open, damp foggy air streamed through the room, the bedclothes—the fine linen sheets that had been Elsie's, the thick checked blankets that were new for Sylvia—were flung back over the foot of the bed. A paper-covered French novel was still on the bedside table.

Everything said "Sylvia! Sylvia! Sylvia!" Jane, as she went downstairs again, imagined herself writing a letter to Sylvia, in which she would say, "We miss you so terribly that we almost wish you hadn't come at all!"

Well, now, what to do? No French this morning, no delightful, desultory lesson interrupted by so much chatter on the side. Lunch in the house to-day; the terrace was dripping with dreary mist. Perhaps Jerry would go for a real walk at four, climb Bowers Hill, and come home by the beach. In that case, Jane reflected, laying her elbow on the mantel and putting her face down upon it to yawn—in that case she would have to change her shoes. She had put on her best white shoes and her white hat and her white serge coat to take Sylvia to the train, and she had been up early in the cool, draughty morning, and everything had been demoralized and queer and irregular.

"I could sleep forever!" Jane complained, looking up to smile at Jerome as he came in with his hands full of opened letters and Too Fah announced luncheon.

Forgetting Sylvia was a dismal business. For days nothing seemed right or natural to Jane. And she could see that Jerry felt it terribly, too.

He was unusually gentle and sweet; it wasn't irritation or impatience that betrayed him. He listened to Carol conscientiously, glancing up now and then to smile at Jane, to invite Jane's sympathy; he was kind even to the dogs; he answered everything Jane said with more than his ordinary politeness and carefulness. When Joe came over on Saturday afternoon they all walked and laughed and shouted on the rocks in the divinely blue, soft, and warm Indian Summer glory, and Sylvia was hardly mentioned, much less lamented.

But Jane missed her, just the same, and accused both the men of missing her, too.

"She was the most beautiful person alive, Joe, you have to admit that!" said Jane, at that evening's fireside.

"There was something about her big mouth, full of those beautiful big hard teeth," she went on enthusiastically. "You know, her visit was a regular triumph for me!" she added.

Joe's look did not move to Jerome, silent in his chair a few feet away, his fingers laced, his dead eyes on the fire.

"How?"

"Why, my not being jealous!" Jane said triumphantly. "For you know I am horribly jealous, Joe," she said confidentially, her blue, clean, childish eyes dancing as she turned them toward him. "I was jealous even of you, at first."

"So I understand," said Joe.

"But before Sylvia came I just made up my mind," Jane pursued; "I made up my mind I would *not* be jealous—and I wasn't! Pretty good for me."

"Pretty good for you," Joe said, in a low voice so full of pain that Jane glanced again at him curiously. Later, when she and Jerome were in their room, she confided to him that she thought something had gone wrong with Joe.

"We don't know anything about his people, Jerry, his history before he came here. Maybe Joe himself has been jealous of someone, and is paying for it. Hasn't he seemed awfully sad—awfully quiet, to you, this week?"

"I—I haven't noticed it," Jerome said, with a little effort.

"It can't be Sylvia," Jane mused on, "for he positively doesn't like her—he said so. Jerry," added Jane, diverted, "you heard what I said about not being jeal-

ous of Sylvia, didn't you? Did you notice how sensible, how *reasonable* I was?"

Jerome was in his dressing gown now, prepared to take his chair beside their roaring little airtight stove and spend the usual hour before going to bed in reading. He put his hands on her shoulders, and turned his sad, troubled eyes to her face, and Jane, sturdy and small and boyish-looking in her white pajamas, with her soft dark hair loosened into a cloudy mop, looked up at him, smiling.

"No, but did you notice it, Jerry?" she said, eagerly.

"I really did, my darling. You are—you are a thousand times better about that," he answered slowly.

"Jerry," said Jane, shrinking closer to him so that, looking down, he could see the soft fuzzy bloom on her brown cheeks in the lamplight, "Jerry, don't ever make me jealous again, will you? I hate it so!"

He folded his long arms about her, dropped his weary tumbled fair head against her dark one, and remained so for a long minute without speaking. After a minute Jane heard him say her name once or twice, and then suddenly he dropped his arms and went to his chair, his face turned away, and Jane animatedly continued her preparations for bed.

"Oh, Jerry—here's this message! Oh, heavens, it may be important," she exclaimed, while she was busily brushing her bushy hair at her dressing table. "Fah brought it up while I was dressing before dinner, and Carol was here and then Joe came in downstairs, and I forgot it!"

"A message?" he said. He did not turn from his book; the room began slowly to circle about him, and his hand trembled.

"Yes, it was telephoned—a telegram. It's from that

old fuss-budget Liebermond in San Francisco,'' Jane said. "He's at the St. Francis Hotel, and he wants to see you if you can come up. Maddening that Sylvia has gone away!" Jane added, concentrating upon a broken fingernail, her brows knitted, her mouth sternly pursed.

"What does it say?" Jerome asked, in a silence when he could hear the clock ticking—ticking, and the soft slashing noise of the eucalyptus sickles outside the window, high up in the windy dark, and beyond them all the breaking of waves on the shore.

Jane picked up the message.

"'At St. Francis until Tuesday'," she read. "'Would be glad to see you.'"

"And it's signed 'Liebermond'," said Jane. "Jerry, must you go?"

"No," he said quickly, "I'm not going!"

"Oh, honestly?" Her brown small face brightened, and the blue eyes shone. "Isn't he important?"

"No," Jerome said again.

"Jerome, you're not staying home on my account?" Jane asked. She was on his knee now, and he locked his arm about her, and looked into her eyes with an odd expression.

"Maybe," he said.

"Well, you oughtn't do that," she said decidedly.

And when, two days later, he came to her in the middle of a quiet morning and said that perhaps he had better go up to town to see Liebermond after all, Jane was quite cheerful.

"You've been absolutely in the dumps since Sylvia went away," she accused him spiritedly. "Go up and talk business to your old German! If Sylvia hadn't gone up to Reno I'd go, too. But don't worry. We'll get on gloriously without you."

"If you say the word," Jerome said heavily on the station platform, "I'll not go."

"I don't say the word!" she answered gaily. "Be off with you—and miss us a little—and don't forget us!"

"No, I'll not forget you," he promised with his good-bye kiss.

CHAPTER XIV

JEROME looked out of the train windows and saw the towns slide by in the clear autumn weather; poplars everywhere were turning yellow, children were back in school now, gathered in flocks on school steps at noon.

All along the east lay the eternal line of the mountains, great rounded amethyst shadows, looking transparent, as if a finger could prick them, rising like the haunches of enormous elephants against the blue, blue sky, blending mysteriously with it. Mountains, mountains, mountains—what a big state it was, after all, that could wear this useless collar of heaped earth between itself and the rest of the world.

At four o'clock San José looked busy and important; they were having some sort of a fiesta, cowboys were galloping about town, and there were dashing posters of girls with sombreros and lace shawls. San José, Palo Alto went by, the happy, prosperous little cities, with trolley cars humming through them and modern architectural developments, raw streets, pink-tiled, diminutive roofs, and young trees radiating from them on all sides.

The lights were lighted in Redwood City, automobiles crawled along the country roads like fiery-eyed beetles in clear twilight, but San Francisco, when he reached it, was gritty and bright in the last of a red sunset and swept by a dying wind. Behind the houses toward the west the sky was ablaze; the red colour was reflected in the shining streets, for there had been a shower, and the sidewalks and paving were still wet.

Jerome went straight to the big hotel and sent his name upstairs. But Mrs. Bellamy did not answer her telephone, so there was nothing for it but patience.

Irresolutely, he stood at the desk, looking at the crowded, luxurious lobby, the great lights softly blooming high overhead, the subdued movements of women in smart frocks and furs, and the hurrying men. He did not know whether or not to engage a room. Perhaps she would rather that he did not do that—perhaps, indeed, he would return to Los Antonios on the nine-o'clock flyer and wake up in his home town, to give Jane and Carol an agreeable surprise at breakfast time tomorrow.

He had nothing special to say to her, now that he was here. There was nothing more to say, except "good-bye" again, and he need not have come two hundred miles to say that.

Suddenly he saw her. She was dressed in a hat and gown he had never seen before; she looked unfamiliar, infinitely remote. Standing in the arch that led to the big dining room, with a tall, solemn-faced old clock behind her, she was talking to two men. There was music drifting from out the tea room, and women kept passing her, going in, meeting each other, but every time there was a clear space he saw her.

Her gown was of black velvet, exquisitely becoming to her fair skin and sweep of pure gold hair. The hat was velvet, too, with a tiny glittering arrow holding a curling soft short feather in place. The plume curved about her ear and rested on her shoulder, and on that same shoulder was pinned a loose cluster of dark violets. Her dark eyes—amber and star sapphire and moonlight, everything mysterious and wonderful—were raised seriously to meet the eyes of the man to whom she was talking. Sylvia——

Jerome went up to her and held out his hand; she turned with her own smooth grace, and a great light came into her eyes.

"Why, Jerry Delafield, I didn't know you were going to be in town!" she said easily. She introduced the men; the small compact one, well-groomed and sophisticated and keen, was "my cousin Tom Frothingham's friend, Mr. Turner," and was called "Ken." The tall, very handsome one, who looked like a football idol or a collar advertisement, Jerome decided, was "Mr. Brett," and evidently something of a stranger to Sylvia, as to Jerome. They four stood talking together, laughing, for a few minutes.

"But now, what about tea?" Sylvia said.

"I can't, Mrs. Bellamy," said Arthur Brett.

"I've got to see my sister's children, in habitat; I might just as well go now and have it over," said Cousin Tom's friend, Mr. Turner. "I say—just a minute!" He drew her aside. "I couldn't, to-morrow night," Jerome heard her say. Mr. Turner was to telephone—it would be lovely.

Jerome stood cold, angry and hurt, during this colloquy, staring gloomily at Arthur Brett.

"What ought I take to my sister's kids?" Mr. Turner said, turning back.

"How old are they?" asked Sylvia, flushed and laughing and lovely beyond words.

"Oh, Lord, I don't know!" said the uncle blankly.

"Girls or vice versa?" asked young Brett.

"One's a girl, I know. Or else it's my sister in Riverside that has girls," said Mr. Turner. Instantly Jerome knew that he was rich, and aristocratic, and spoiled. "Tea wouldn't be any fun anyway," the original speaker added frankly. "I mean it'd be terribly nice—and jolly—and all that!" he said. "But I wanted you to myself.

You're quite too chic, and you know what I mean, and what have you, in that dress," he finished, in the light surface tone of the man who has talked a great deal to women at teas, country clubs, races, and on steamer decks, and at dances, and wherever idle, beautiful women congregate.

"I like it," Sylvia said simply. Jerome did not speak; he was choking.

Turner and Brett, who proved to be his private secretary, disappeared, and Sylvia said, "Come in and have tea."

"I don't know whether you want me to or not," Jerome said in sulky dignity.

She looked up at him, sweep of gold hair, curve of velvet hat, peach cheek, raised eyelashes. The scent of her violets, dying in this hot air, reached his nostrils; it was dusky in the passage, and soft music came to them from the tea room.

"Come and have tea," she said again faintly.

She took his hand, and Jerome felt his senses begin to swim deliciously, and became blind, deaf, and dumb, guided by the warm, incredibly soft fingers.

They found a remote table, and Sylvia sat down on the tufted red velvet cushion against the wall, laid her hand over his on the table, and said, blankly, incredulously, exhaustedly, "Jerry."

"I had to," he said hoarsely.

"Of course you had to!" And after a while she added, "Jerry, this isn't real. I've imagined it so much, I've longed for it so much, I can't feel that it's real."

"No, I don't feel it's real, either."

"Oh, my darling, to have you again!"

"You missed me then?" he said. "I've been travelling all day, Sylvia, I'm tired. And to see you, smiling up at those men——"

"That's Kenneth Turner and his secretary," she said indifferently. And then again, breathing hard, staring at him, her eyes at their widest, her breath coming hard, "*Jerry*," she said.

"You *are* glad to see me, Sylvia!"

"Glad!" she echoed in a mere shadow of her own voice. And she looked away, her smooth fingers resting on his hand beneath the table. "Let's not talk!" she whispered.

"He wants to know what we want," Jerry said, of the waiter, after a while.

"Oh, anything. Tea. Toast. Yes, cream; yes, hot water," Sylvia said impatiently.

They sat perfectly still for a few minutes after the man went away, Sylvia's hand resting in Jerry's, their eyes on each other.

"Like it, having tea with me?"

"Jerry!"

"Well, but you do, don't you, dear?"

Her eyes misted, and she blinked, smiling.

"Too much!"

Another silence, while they listened to the "Blue Danube," exquisitely, sensuously flowing all over the room.

"Isn't it an adorable old thing?"

"Always—always. It's the music of youth—and being in love," Sylvia said dreamily.

"Dearest, are you happy?"

"Oh, happy!"

"I didn't mean to come," Jerome confessed after a while. "I was sure that I wouldn't."

"No, and I didn't mean to telegraph you," Sylvia assured him.

"But you did," Jerome said, in satisfaction.

"And so did you," Sylvia countered, and suddenly

both laughed, softly, delightedly. "Oh, it is terrible to want anyone as much as I have been wanting you, Jerry!" she said seriously, after a pause.

"But it makes this——" He indicated with a gesture of his shoulder the tea room, softly lighted, the music, the murmuring groups. "It makes this awfully nice," he said.

"This——" said Sylvia, with a long sigh, "is heaven!"

They talked of nothing—of everything. Monosyllables were enough, little murmured scraps of interrogation and affirmation, nods, swift glances, half smiles. Their heads were close together for a while, Sylvia's elbows on the table, her chin resting on her linked fingers. Jerome's face was so close that he could smell the fresh woody smell of the violets, mingling with the aroma of the tea, and the general perfumed sweetness of the big room.

It was all happiness—happiness. The accidental touch of her finger tip against his hand as she took a cigarette, the adorable flush that some word of his brought to her face. Once she got a little confused in speaking, laughed, put the beautiful little plumed head on one side. Time vanished, space vanished, all the world was reduced to this little softly lighted table in a mirrored ingle, shut away safely in the great hotel, away from reality, from reason, from duty and responsibility.

"What brought you, Jerry?"

Their laughter flashed together.

"Liebermond."

After a moment Sylvia's radiant face grew sober.

"I couldn't help it," she said.

"I love you for not being able to help it, darling."

"Jane——" she said, frowning faintly, "Jane doesn't suspect?"

"Nothing," he answered definitely, his own forehead clouding as hers had done.

"Jerry," said Sylvia very seriously, "I know that what we—what we feel for each other doesn't rob Jane—doesn't hurt Jane. I couldn't—I couldn't do it, if it did!"

"I know that, sweetheart," he said gravely.

"For I love Jane," Sylvia said, tears in her amber eyes.

"You love everyone, I think," Jerome said adoringly.

"It would make her unhappy if she knew, for she would imagine all sorts of things," Sylvia began doubtfully.

"She'll never know!" Jerome said definitely.

"I know," the woman began, after a pause, logically, speaking slowly, as if she were reasoning it out. "I know that I *have* given pleasure to Jane—my visit, I mean. It has been happy for her. She—" Sylvia looked up naïvely—"she *does* like me?" she queried.

"You are the loveliest thing God ever made," Jerome said under his breath, watching her.

"Ah, no, I'm not, Jerry," she answered humbly. "I'm only a poor, weak, miserable failure, who didn't meet the right man until it was too late! But I'm trying to do the thing that will hurt us all least, you and me and Jane," she went on, spreading her hands with her own characteristic little gesture. "I'm giving you up."

"I think," he said slowly, looking down at the tablecloth his restless fork was marking in little even lines, "I think I begin to see that it's right. We have to end it. There's nothing else to do."

"I told you that you would see that some day!" Sylvia said proudly, her eyes quickening as she smiled at him.

"And I do," Jerome said briefly. He put his elbows on

the table and his forehead into his big hands. "My God, I don't know how I can!" he said.

"You can because I can," Sylvia answered in a silence.

"You're wonderful!" Jerome said.

"No, Jerry." Her smile was dewy with a quick mist of tears. "I'm not wonderful. I'm just in love—and I've never cared about any man before."

"I'd rather have had this week," she said after a while, "and now have to say good-bye—as we do have to say good-bye—than not to have had it at all!"

"I have a funny kind of a feeling that—far from losing anything by this," Jerome broke out suddenly, "Jane is going to gain by it. For I believe it's going to make a difference to me. I'm going back to-morrow, thankful—thankful for you, and for loving you, and seeing all the world different, because of that!"

Her eyes shone.

"That's what I want you to feel," said Sylvia, slender, lovely, velvet-clad, perfumed with violets, leaning forward across the rosy light on the tea table. "We mustn't hurt anyone, Jerry."

"No, we mustn't hurt anyone," he said gravely.

They left the hotel at half-past six, and Sylvia went with Jerome to the big hostelry on the hill top, and waited in the lobby while he went upstairs to leave his bag and make himself fresh. She sat in a round-backed red velvet chair in the immense and lofty foyer listening to more music, delicate stringed music inextricably mingled with the other sounds of the big hotel; women in evening gowns passing her, murmuring, men rising from their own red velvet chairs to meet them. There was an exhibition of paintings in the lattice-roofed tea room; groups were moving there, dissolving, forming again.

To each other they looked amazing, surprising, when

they met at a few minutes past seven. Sylvia saw Jerry walking toward her from the elevator, tall, loosely built, and fair-haired, oddly impressive, even by his very indifference to effect. And Jerome saw the slender, straight lines of the velvet dress, and the sweep of dark plume about the shining gold hair, and the violets, richly purple against the gold and black. Her eyes were luminous as she rose to join him; Jerome was conscious that every man in the room was watching Sylvia as she walked beside him to the door.

"Jerry," she said in a low tone, her fingers fitting themselves into his when they were out in the soft darkness of the night, "is this wonderful?"

"Oh, it's too—too——" Words failed him, and they went along together, down the steep blocks toward Chinatown, without speaking.

The Oriental quarter blazed with coloured lights, its high deep balconies, with carved rails and templed roofs, were glowing with pink, red, gold, opal, silver. The big street windows were filled with jade and teakwood, carved ivories and magnificent brocades. Jerry and Sylvia loitered past the smarter shops, penetrated on to the narrow buildings, where china jars and tea in corded square packages crowded into the dark windows, and salamanders and cuttlefish floated suspended in mysterious great bottles.

They came to the markets, where in dim green glass tanks fish were busily swimming about; and where long limp scarfs of pink and white squid, the deadly octopus of the Western waters, dangled from hooks, awaiting sale. There were pyramids of tiny hairy shrimps here, layers of restless, investigating crawfish, great salmon, clear pink, with bulging, watery white eyes.

Dried oysters, as black as rubber, were hung about on strings; ghastly looking square white meal cakes were

piled high; mysterious curly beans and strange great roots like twisted sweet potatoes filled splint baskets. There were smells everywhere, dark oily doors and surfaces and lattices everywhere, shuffling forms everywhere, and on all sides were the cryptic, innocent, open yellow faces of the Chinese.

At the end of the street swarmed the Italian quarter; its macaroni merchants, its coloured postcards, its markets with their tethered baby goats, and its photographers' doorways, lined with wedding and First Communion photographs, encroached upon Chinatown's northern border. Immediately beyond was an untidy straggle of waterfront running out of sight behind Telegraph Hill; it was set with factories and fisheries and fringed like a shawl, as the whole city, spread on its hills, was fringed, with the sharp points of a thousand masts.

Jerry bought Sylvia a blue bowl out of which to eat bread and cream, and Sylvia bought him a lacquer box for ties or cigarette holders or pens, or whatever else he fancied. They went into the Chinese theatre and sat very quiet, a little subdued and utterly happy, in the hot glare that lighted the shabby old place, and the deafening noise of the crashing orchestra, and the high-pitched, whining voices. A little Chinese lady in inexpressibly beautiful brocade and headdress held the middle of the stage, hardly moving even eyes or hands as she continued her long recitative to the constant booming of drums. She carried a tasselled stick in her small ivory hand, and a good-natured young Chinese near Sylvia explained in scanty clear English that this signified that she was mounted on horseback.

"Now she turns back of foot," said the Chinese, "mean to say going a long way. When she show back of foot to audience, mean to say 'now I am travelling.'"

Sylvia, fascinated, tried to understand the plot of the play, which had been continued for three nights, at long sessions from seven to twelve o'clock, and would go on for still another night. But her neighbour's English was not equal to the demand. He bashfully submitted detached words. "Princess. King. Bad man. To have son come" was comprehensible, but it did not seem to make clear the long, whining story of the beautiful little lady, or explain the sudden violent entrance of several magnificent creatures in square-cut stiff brocades, with headdresses towering with silver bells and long cock-pheasant feathers three feet above their masked and ferocious faces.

"Jerry, don't we have fun?" said Sylvia, in the street. "Wasn't that wonderful?"

"Memorable," he said. "It's only," he added, with his voice full of pain, "that it has to end!"

Lights were shining from the angled door of old Saint Mary's.

"Let's go in."

Sylvia led the way. The church was almost empty; there were great shaggy pale yellow chrysanthemums on the altar and pale yellow candles; the big dim place was scented with hot wax and the fumes of incense.

"I prayed for you," said Sylvia, in a whisper, as they were coming out.

"Did you, dear?"

"And me," she said, her eyes solemn.

"There's something utterly adorable about you," Jerome told her as they walked down through the Japanese shops, and past the turtle and goldfish store and past the old jewellery store with its abalone pearls and fringed earrings, and so came into the deserted canyon of the downtown streets and reached New Frank's, where it had been arranged they were to dine.

It was now nearly nine o'clock, and Sylvia was starving, she said. Pierre, dapper and intelligent and interested, had weathered the seven-o'clock rush and could give the untrammelled mind of an artist to their dinner. They sat at a small table with a damp, immaculate white cloth on it and clinked the coarse knives against the coarse glasses and ate the most wonderful food in the world—sea food, shrimps and salmon, and sweet flavoury oysters no bigger than cent pieces, and the delicious vegetables of the West, broccoli and artichokes and zucchini, and "fruits Marie Jardin," smoking hot in round pottery bowls, and to end with, cheese and figs and apples—Biblical food, said Sylvia.

"I love you," Sylvia said.

"Ah, my dear!" Jerry laughed briefly, mirthlessly, looked away.

"I'm glad to know what it is," said Sylvia. "It makes everything in life so much richer, so much more comprehensible," she added, after a silence.

"You go back now, Jerry, to happiness, I know."

"Yes, it's happiness," he said, "of a kind."

"You have your work, and you have Carol, and wonderful Storm House," Sylvia summarized it. "And you have dear Jane."

Jerome was silent a minute, looking down thoughtfully, his face half sad, half smiling.

"Jane is a good little sport," he said.

"She's a wonderful little sport," Sylvia said warmly.

"And the one thing that comforts me in this," the man went on, "Jane isn't going to pay. You and I have to pay!"

"I'm glad of it!" Sylvia said quickly.

"She's given me," Jerome added, after a musing space, "everything that she had to give. She's given me the most loyal and devoted companionship——"

"The other," Sylvia supplied, as he paused, "she couldn't give."

"No," Jerome said hesitatingly. And again his absent smile was for his wife.

Sylvia walked back with him to the big hotel on the hilltop and went upstairs to the enormous corner suite he had engaged. They did not light the lights when they got there, but sat in two deep armchairs at the wide-open back windows, looking out at the glorious panorama that lay spread in clear blue moonlight below them. Berkeley and Oakland lay blazing like enormous bracelets of diamonds palpitating on the velvet dark, tiny ferryboats moved like sparks on the bay, the soft line of the distant mountains closed in the picture like a dimly painted curtain.

Nearer, the Ferry Tower rose into the night, with its big clock hands moving to eleven, to twelve, to one. And still they sat there, hands linked, voices lowered, souls steeped in the utter felicity of being together, they two alone, utterly, exquisitely in accord among all the uncongenialities and discords and disappointments and sordid stupidities of the city. At peace.

CHAPTER XV

WHEN Jerome went back to Los Antonios the next night he took both "his girls" presents. Carol had a Japanese coat of silky cotton fabric stencilled in daisies and roses and a score of other flowers, and Jane had a string of crystals, as round and smooth as tiny bubbles, and dangling clusters of ball earrings to match. Earrings, oddly enough, looked well upon her boyish little head; they gave her a dignity, an absurd babyish haughtiness, which Jerome loved and at the same time found amusing.

She and Carol and a dog or two met him at the train, at ten minutes past eight on a dull, sunless morning that smelled of leaves and winter. The cool, soft, motionless air felt deliciously refreshing on Jerome's flushed, train-hot face as he got down from the car. Very few persons were astir in the village, and those who were looked frowsy and stupid, but Jane and Carol were as radiant and dewy as roses. They were dressed alike, young stepmother and fast-growing girl, in bluejacket blouses and pleated serge skirts, with big white sweaters pulled down over their slender hips, and tam-o'-shanter caps. The long ends of a scarlet tie were blown over Jane's shoulder.

It seemed good to Jerome to be driving out to Storm House with them, to skirt the wide puddles an untimely rain had left in the road and smell the clean smell of fields and woods. Jane was at the wheel, Jerome beside her; Carol, relegated with the dogs to the back seat,

hung over her father's shoulder and pressed her cold, sweet, firm cheek against his.

"Jerry—was it awful?"

"Dad, lissen. A girl at school said that her father——"

"Oh, but it's going to be gorgeous. Yesterday began just this way, and then it was actually hot! How was the city? But you hardly saw it. Did you have dinner with old Von Hindenburg?"

"Lissen, Dad. Did you remember the turtles?"

He had bought the turtles in Chinatown, it seemed years ago. But it had been only yesterday, with Sylvia beside him, slender and tall and beautiful in her black gown, with fresh violets on her shoulder and the sweep of a plume about her yellow hair. He had paid a boy twenty-five cents to take the two sliding, quivering little crustaceans up to his hotel.

Jerome felt a certain grateful lassitude. It was good to get home, it would be good to bathe and read his letters and come to dinner with these two sweet, affectionate girls in their white bluejacket blouses. Storm House was a refuge, a place in which to recover his bearings, in which to clear his dizzy brain and steady his whirling senses.

"Oh, Jerry, it's so good to have you back!" Jane said.

"Is he coming down?" she presently asked.

"Who?"

"Old Liebermond?"

"He's going to Los Angeles, but he can't stop here. I may have to go up to the city again, though, but I don't expect to," Jerome said. It had sounded flimsy when Sylvia had instructed him, yesterday; it had sounded palpably false. But Jane accepted it innocently enough.

"You should have stayed another day, Jerry. It's

perfectly murderous to go up one day and come home the next night."

Jerome did not answer. At her innocent words he felt a pang of something that was almost vertigo. He had left her—he had said good-bye to Sylvia! The full anguish of it smote him suddenly with full force.

They had had a long day together yesterday, lunching at a quiet place out on the beach, with the Pacific rolling itself in over level miles of sandy shore beneath their eyes. They had dined at a tiny place hung on the steep sides of Telegraph Hill. And she had come with him to his nine-o'clock train last night, both of them silent, tired, jaded after the emotions of the long twenty-eight hours.

The good-bye—it was to be forever—had been simple, wordless, brief. It was all over; they could not claim even friendship, they would not write to each other.

That had been last night, only a dozen hours ago. And now—already, even as he entered quiet old Storm House, and saw the pleasant flickering of firelight in the dark hall, and smiled at Hong and Too Fah, and went upstairs to talk with Jane, Carol curled in his lap, Jane's small brown hands busily unpacking—even now the need for Sylvia rose within him, and he felt sick with longing and pain.

It all seemed so vague, the charming, chattering girls in their middy blouses, the charming airy country bedroom, shabby, but homelike and comfortable, the wide-open windows, and the trailing end of fog moving mysteriously about the big boles of the oak and palm trees in the garden. Unreal—unimportant—he somehow could not bring his heart to it. The real life was far away from here, centred about a tall, slender figure in black velvet—with violets—with a plumed hat pressed down over a sweep of pure gold hair.

He tried to settle down, went up to his cabin to glance carelessly at his mail, toss the envelopes aside unopened, and sit at his desk with his head buried in his hands; not thinking, not reasoning, simply feeling with every fibre of his being. Emotion and memory rushed over him in great waves; he could not resist them, he could do nothing but sit there, helpless and shaken, muttering now and then only a thick, despairing "God!"

After a while he seized a piece of paper and wrote Sylvia a long letter, numbering wild page after page, folding them all for a feverish rereading, sealing them into a big envelope. He told Jane and Carol at luncheon that he had to go into Los Antonios, and they delightedly volunteered to accompany him; the sun was shining hotly now, and Jane looked her best in a salmon-pink linen and a broad hat with a dark blue band on it. Jerome, mailing his letter with his own hand, feeling somehow close to Sylvia as it slipped out of sight into the open chute, was vaguely conscious that Jane was quite an important woman in these days; she was cute, too, a small sturdy person with a round face and flashing blue eyes and with her skin healthily sunburned, like that of a small boy, a faint powdering of gold freckles stretching across her nose.

"I wish you'd act on that, Mrs. Delafield," said a nice-looking woman in the post office.

"I will!" said Jane decidedly. "I'll bring it up at the next meeting. It was entirely irregular—and even if we have to reopen the books, I think it ought to be changed."

"Mrs. Delafield is the best president we've ever had," said Mrs. Henderson, proudly, to Jerome.

"You can imagine what my home life is like," Jerome answered with his pleasant smile. "Having a club president for a wife!"

"Oh, we all know she spoils *you!*" Mrs. Henderson assured him elatedly.

"Mr. Delafield and I have had our first separation in five years," Jane announced, one hand on the inky, dirty, swinging door of the post office; "I think that's pretty good."

. . . And all the while there was nothing in the world but Sylvia. Jerome imagined her receiving his letter, reading it, answering it, and a delicious weakness and dizziness swept over him. He knew that he would not breathe easily until that little answering letter came. Sylvia was to disguise her handwriting on the envelope —the poor darling! It made him laugh to think what a botch she would make of that undertaking.

"Jerry, did you sleep well on the train?"

The words were sounding somewhere in the autumn afternoon; he and Jane were standing at Thompson's corner; why were they standing there, outside the drug store? A woman, crossing the street, had had a narrow escape from being killed by Silva's truck. This was a tag day of some sort, girls with cigar boxes and green tags were loitering on the sidewalk.

"I didn't hear you, dear!"

Jane laughed maternally.

"I asked if you slept well on the train. You seem so dreamy and sleepy this afternoon."

"No, I slept rottenly."

"Could you get some sleep before dinner?" Jane bowed enthusiastically to a young woman who was crowded into a mud-splashed car with small children.

"I beg your pardon, dear. I thought you were speaking to that woman."

"That's young Mrs. Joe Robinson," Jane said, watching the shabby car go down the street. "She has three

small kids now, and she thinks there's going to be another. She told me about it yesterday."

"Where's Carol?" Jerome said suddenly.

"In the drug store, dear, getting her cap," Jane answered, mildly surprised. "Oh, Alice!" she called to a sweatered young girl who was crossing the street, "come back a minute. Alice, how did it come out?"

"Just the way you said it would, Mrs. Delafield," the girl said, nodding to Jerome. "The girls talked it all over," she explained, "and they said they thought you were right. We're going to *have* it," said Alice, "but make it pretty big—pretty general."

"I'm glad," said Jane.

"And Mother said to thank you, Mrs. Delafield," the girl added, with a sudden flush and a little confusion.

"Oh, I didn't do anything!" Jane protested, flushed and smiling nervously in her turn.

The whole dreaming world smelled spicily of apples as with their bundles, letters, and magazines the Delafields drove slowly home. Jane's thoughts were busy; she was distracted by all the interests of the women's club and the girls' club, the messages of neighbours and the pleasant inner sense of being loved and necessary. She talked to Jerry about plans and enterprises: a Hallowe'en dance, to which Carol was going as a pumpkin. Carol's own slender body would be hidden in the great fat round fruit, her long legs would be covered with bright green stockings, her slippers disguised with opened leaves, and her shoulders emerge from a collar of them. The carpenter was making a light stave support for the pumpkin cover. Jane stopped and talked with him, consciously wasting time in the autumn sunlight in the shade before the forge.

"The head part is easy!" she assured Carol. "You

and I'll go up attic this afternoon and see what we can find."

"You're the best p'r'r'son that ever lived!" Carol stated in passionate gratitude.

Jerome smiled at them both; he did not feel alive, somehow, except for the dull heavy pain that was eternally eating—eating—eating into his soul.

The following afternoon he feigned another errand into Los Antonios, just as the late mail train came in. No letter. No letter.

He turned away from the post office feeling weak and sick. There could be no letter now until the morning mail to-morrow; he did not see how he could live until then.

The next morning Jane brought it home to him, innocently enough, among a score of other envelopes. It was inconspicuous, a plain white envelope, an unrecognizable and yet natural-looking handwriting. She had gotten someone else to write it for her. Perhaps a maid—perhaps the nice woman of whom she had spoken who washed her lovely hair in the beauty parlour.

He trembled as he took the letters; he was shaking so, when Jane had gone singing down the path from his cabin and he found himself alone, that for a full minute he could not open Sylvia's envelope, but picked it up only to put it down again.

Four pages, covered with her irregular, dashing handwriting; Jerome put it to his lips, bent his head over it, his eyes filled with tears, his hungry heart starving for its first word.

He sat so, his elbows on the desk, the letter crushed against his cheek, for a long time. Outside, the silent, sweet world moved on, and the sea crept upon the land, and was pushed back, and crept, in widening creamy

circles, earthward again. There was a blue haze in the air; gnats spun and buzzed in the sunshine under the oaks and Jane's voice receded into the general dim blur of distant noises that seemed only a deeper sort of silence.

"My dear, my dear," wrote Sylvia. The lovely words followed one another in a rush of devotion and longing. She phrased it all simply, yet exquisitely. The little detached sentences wrung his heart with love and bliss.

"It's a terrible thing, this loving a man," she wrote. "I've seen it written about, in books. . . .

"Why, wasn't it Shakespeare who wrote something about it?

"And Browning, I'm sure he did—I can't think where.

"This interesting city, the gateway of the Orient, as it is so truly called, is composed of vacant lots and the empty fronts of empty houses. You think they're houses. But they're just blank walls that look like houses. And at the hotels they serve only the best sawdust and plaster of Paris and husks and shavings when you order your meals."

Gallant, resolutely brave, loving. The pages were closely covered. And at the bottom she had crowded her own small name, or rather his name for her, into the last scrap of available space; "I am so bad I put myself into the corner. Your Silver."

Before it was half read, the phrases with which he would answer her—the happy, loving, tender, sad, eloquent phrases—began to form themselves in his mind.

It seemed incredible that the common mail, the gray sacks with black stencilling on them, could safely bring through the dark night and the cluttered dirty stations, over the rough ground, anything so delicate, precious, exquisite as this letter.

He read it a score of times, turning back to the first words the instant he had reached the last, and when he had put it deep into the lower drawer of his desk, under some business papers, he felt it there, glowing like a living thing, alone in the dark.

She had moved from her hotel to the one at which he had stayed, extravagant darling that she was! Installed now in the very room he had had a few days ago, she could see "our view" all day, she said.

"The yellowish-green light is a restaurant over on that hill," she wrote. "For I placed it very carefully by streets, and then walked over there and found it without any trouble at all!"

The letter filled Jerome with ecstasy; he felt that he had never had such a letter, never felt such overwhelming joy and richness in his life. He hated it to grow old, to have been in his possession hours, instead of minutes, to be yesterday's letter—day-before-yesterday's letter. At night when he left his cabin he was conscious of thinking a good-night to the buried pages, and in the morning his first act was to slip his hand in under the other documents and assure himself that it was safe.

After a few days he discovered that he had extracted every particle of sweetness from it; it held no more surprises. He knew it by heart—which words were merely wonderful, which ones breath-taking. It would always be dear to him, Sylvia's first love-letter, but now it was dear more because of what it had been than because of what it was. He began to long for its successor.

No day went by without its letter to her, and in composing these Jerome felt that he spent his only satisfied hours. Even these were not wholly happy, but at least he lived for them and thought about them between times.

He had been home about a week when Jane brought

home from the village a telegram for him. The telephone was not always answered at Storm House and messages usually came in this form.

"Miss Lilly told me—and by the way, her mother's dead," Jane said casually, spilling letters and papers to his desk; "you know her, Jerry, she's that pale girl in the telegraph office—she told me that it's from your everlasting friend Liebermond."

Jerry was conscious of swallowing with a dry throat as he opened it. He managed to fuss convincingly with other envelopes.

Leaving for East Thursday. Any chance of seeing you? [read the telegram.]

"Drat him! What does he think you are, a guide?" Jane exclaimed.

Jerome laughed, encircling her with the nearer arm. There was something engaging about sturdy little Jane.

"No, but he's lonely," he said. And his heart leaped and soared and sang. She wanted to see him again!

"Then I think you ought to go," said Jane. It was immediately settled that he should do so.

"I'd go with you," she added, "but it's only for the one night, and it's Allhallow E'en. I've got to take the baby to her party and sit along the side lines with all the others, talking about the smartness of our children."

And suddenly, very serious, she sighed and leaned against him her rosy, blue-eyed face. But Jerry saw nothing of this. He was accustomed to Jane's quiet, undying sorrow over her thwarted motherhood, and he was thinking about Sylvia.

The telegram said "Los Angeles," but he knew she was still in San Francisco, tirelessly ingenious in her devices to save Jane from any suspicion. "We must

think of Jane first," she always said. And often, "I don't think Jane could possibly grudge us our happiness, do you, Jerdy? It's such a little, tiny scrap of happiness with such a long, lonesome, miserable time to follow!"

Once she said sombrely, "I loathe women who take husbands away from their wives. I ought to despise myself, Jerdy, oughtn't I?"

And Jerome answered seriously, "Dearest, you're not taking anything away from Jane. You've made me a much better man. You've taught me so much, Sylvia, that my whole life is going to be different—is going to be happier. And that," he ended, with his own peculiarly keen smile, "is going to make for a happier Jane, isn't it?"

"Besides," Sylvia sometimes said, analyzing it all, "we didn't want this to come into our lives, did we, Jerdy? We wouldn't have permitted it for an instant if we'd dreamed."

"We're not responsible for the fact that we love each other, Sylvia. It's just—a fact. And ever since the beginning of anything—history, literature—it has been the biggest force in the world. Everybody recognizes that—everyone knows that a man and a woman can't help it. It just takes possession of them."

"And even if it's unfortunate, Jerdy, even if it's, like ours, all wrong, it has a certain sort of dignity, hasn't it? I mean the real thing?"

"But I won't admit ours is all wrong, sweetheart. If a thing doesn't hurt anyone, does no harm, how can it be wrong? The only real sin is cruelty, and we aren't hurting anyone. In a few days—" It was always in a few days—"in a few days you'll be up in Nevada, and I'll be back home, and who'll be any the worse?"

"I shall be—very heartachy," she said wistfully.

"Ah, and what will I be? But that part," Jerome elucidated it, "that part we can't escape. And what other wrong is there?"

"None, my darling."

"None. Well, of course!" And that was settled to their satisfaction. "Jane's the only person we *could* hurt, and we're not hurting Jane!" Sylvia summarized it.

CHAPTER XVI

AND then, almost before they could get used to the marvellous reality of caring for each other, there came a change. On his third visit to San Francisco Jerome was met by a pale and constrained Sylvia with a fresh cablegram folded into a tiny blue and white wedge in her purse all ready to show him.

Garth Bellamy had died suddenly in France, and Sylvia was a widow in truth.

"Why, did he mean so much to you, dear?" Jerome asked in real surprise, as through the whole afternoon and evening she continued thoughtful and sad.

"Oh, yes, Jerdy. And it's no idea—the idea that poor Garth—after all, I loved him. After all, we did live together for nearly ten years!"

And Sylvia, who had been smiling, was suddenly nearer tears, and she put her white hand over her eyes and sat thus, her head drooped forward, her elbow on the tea table for a few heartrending minutes.

Then she looked up, quite herself again. But she was subdued and quiet all evening, and her dependence upon him, her assumption that he would advise and sustain her during the necessary formalities in connection with Garth's death, just a little alarmed Jerome. In her natural shock at the news, and her natural grief for the old lost dreams of youth and love, she was inclined to be absolutely unthinking. Nor could he, at this particular moment, hurt her with warnings to be discreet.

He himself hardly knew how to tell Jane the news,

Presumably he had gone into San Francisco to consult an eye doctor; it was a little awkward to return home with the tidings of Garth's death. Jane might naturally ask how he happened to know it.

With Sylvia's help a plausible story was at last devised. Jane was to be told that Sylvia had got the news in Nevada and had come down to San Francisco intending to go on to Storm House. But she and Jerome had chanced to meet in the street.

Jerome was pricked with bitter compunction when he saw how readily Jane accepted this story. She was full of sympathy for Sylvia; it must be a horrid experience to be widowed, even under the circumstances. But why hadn't Jerry brought her right down with him?

"Well, there's a lot of business to it, dear. She has a lawyer in San Francisco, and she is better there. She was resting, and quite composed and quiet."

And so on and on. Jane listened with her head cocked on one side and her bright blue eyes fixed on his, like the eyes of a bird.

"We'll all go up this week, Jerry, and see her!" Jane decided, concernedly. And while he read and pondered by that evening's fire he was disturbed by the spectacle of Jane, with one foot hooked up against her leg and the bitten tip of her tongue protruding between her red lips, as always in moments of literary concentration, composing a letter of condolence for Sylvia.

Somehow, he reflected uneasily, Garth's death had seemed to tighten the tie between himself and Sylvia and bring their hidden love nearer the light. The life of this far-away man who had been her husband really had had no influence on the situation at all, but it was during this evening that Jerome felt a first pang of real terror regarding the safety of his secret—a first nauseated touch of fear lest Jane should sometime know.

What would Jane think? He knew too well. And what could he say? His imagination failed him. The blow would almost kill that sturdy, loyal little heart.

Jane, distressingly enough, was curiously engaging and endearing this evening. Jerome could not remember when he had laughed so much at her, found her so admirable and interesting, so boyish and young.

"Listen, Jerry. How's this?" But instead of commencing to read, she ran her eyes over the letter silently.

"It's sure to be perfect, Jane. Think of all those club papers!"

Her delighted laugh, and a half-shamed, half-proud flash of her bright eyes.

"Listen, Jerry," she said again. And aloud she read, with the demure air of a small girl with a composition:

DEAREST, DEAREST SYLVIA:

I am so sorry to think of you as alone up there in San Francisco with all the memories that must be so sad just now, thinking of Garth dead, away over there in France. I know how glad you are that what you are doing—or were doing—was for his happiness, even though it is too late now. Of course we want you down here, just as soon as you will come, and meanwhile, mayn't I come to see you on Wednesday, for we are all going up for my grandmother's seventieth birthday.

Loving you very much,
JANE.

"That's perfect," Jerome said, feeling more uncomfortable than he had ever felt with Jane before, feeling heartache and affection and shame and pity all in one.

She put the letter into its envelope, sealed it, laughed at him across it, as if there was something amusing about the performance, and then came unexpectedly to get into his lap and sit there as she loved to do.

"Glad to be home, Jerry?"

"Well, what do you think?"

He kissed the top of her dark soft mop of hair; his voice was as usual.

"I love you, old man," Jane said suddenly, her rich, boyish voice lowered to a pitch of emotion that was not customary. Jerome felt his heart shaken by a sudden onslaught of compunction.

"Are you glad?" persisted Jane, as he was silent.

"I'm not so sure I deserve it, Jane."

"Oh, Jerry, don't be modest—don't be humble! You deserve everything in the world."

After a while, with a great sigh of content and weariness and sleepiness, she added, "Aren't we happy?"

"I think we are," he conceded. A queer little pain twisted his heart as he spoke. Jerry seemed to appreciate in a clear flash exactly how richly happy he was, with this clinging, sturdy, sweet, loving little creature so content in his arms, with the fire burning and the lights lighted and the sea murmuring to itself down at the foot of the cliff, and with his small daughter safe upstairs in bed.

"Are you going to stay here awhile now, Jerry?"

"Well, unless we go up for your grandmother's birthday."

"Sylvia won't need you?"

Jerome had a strange feeling that the woman with whom he had been having this secret and absorbing affair was not the widow of Garth Bellamy, was not the black-clad Sylvia he had seen yesterday at the hotel. There seemed to be no Sylvia anywhere. No radiant, golden-headed woman who had been simple and unexacting and inaccessible a few weeks ago.

"Oh, Sylvia—oh, yes. She may," he answered confusedly. And much later that night, when Jane was asleep with her tumbled little dark head on his shoulder, he thought that if he had not gone so far with Sylvia,

if they two had been satisfied with a few kisses, with a few indiscreet and passionate letters, with a few stolen dinner and tea hours, if he could withdraw now, it would be infinitely the best thing to do. To confess so much to Jane, to have her forgive him, to be once more reëstablished in his own esteem—this would have made the pang of parting from Sylvia bearable, however hard it might be.

But as it was, he neither belonged to Sylvia nor to this serenely sleeping child whose hand was locked in his and whose head lay on his shoulder.

He lay awake hour after hour, watching the sallow autumn moonlight checker the ceiling and move in blocks and angles of shade down the dim rosy paper of the walls.

Sylvia. Jane. Sylvia. Jane.

Jane, sturdy and square and honest and sweet, busy and happy here at Storm House, living for him, watching him with her loyal, burning blue eyes, silent, loquacious, laughing, grave, just as his mood dictated. Jane, in her bluejacket blouses and white tams, screaming over squid and starfish on the shore, captured by the tumbling edges of inrushing waves, breathless, eager, hungry, always with Carol or one of the airedales close at her heels, was his wife.

And Sylvia, graceful, velvet-clad, perfumed, golden-headed, with her haunting voice and her enchanting personality, was so much less—and so much more. Jane was all girl. Sylvia was all woman.

They went to the city, all three of the Delafields, a day or two later and stayed at the very hotel where Sylvia was staying. Jerome drove the car, and Jane and Carol, in their belted brown coats that were so much alike, sat bundled into the front seat with him, chatter-

ing all the way. It was a great adventure for them, and a hundred times Jerome heard them say to each other, "Isn't this *fun!*"

They had launch at San José. They reached the city at about four o'clock, and Jane entered at once into the countrywoman's enjoyment of luxury and leisure. She liked her big rooms with their wide water view, and she and Carol fussed about like happy children, unpacking bags, putting things away. Jane telephoned at once to Sylvia, and Sylvia immediately came downstairs from her own rooms on the floor above.

"We aren't going to have tea," Jane explained, when she and the guest had talked for a while, "because Carol and I are going to leap into the car—it's parked right outside here—and rush out to see my grandmother. And then we're going to have an early dinner upstairs here, and maybe our husband and father will take us to see Fred Stone."

At the moment she was wearing the skirt of the little suit she had worn into town and a loose, short Oriental dressing jacket. In her hand was her hairbrush, and as she spoke she turned her head upside down and vigorously brushed and tossed her thick, short dark mop.

"Her energy simply exhausts me," said Jerome from an armchair.

"I keep forgetting that you have quite a family here," Sylvia observed, watching her.

"Grandfather, Grandmother, Aunt San, Uncle Peter, and Uncle Joe," Jane enumerated from under her hair.

"And Shummy and Nelly and Spud," Carol added jealously. "And Barnabas Yelloweyes."

"Oh, yes, a raft of dogs and cats!" Jane admitted.

"Jerome and I'll have tea," Sylvia suggested.

"Oh, I wish you would! And, Jerry, when he comes up order dinner, will you, for seven o'clock sharp?

And you'll telephone about tickets, won't you? I'm not going to bathe or anything until I come back," Jane said, running about madly, opening and shutting bureau drawers and closet doors.

"I'm going to sleep in a cot in this room, Aunt Sylvia!"

"Imagine!"

"And to-morrow I and a girl are going to see the Aquarium," exulted Carol.

"Sylvia, what would you give a woman of seventy on her birthday? It's my grandmother. She knits shawls and bedjackets and things for the Woman's Exchange," Jane said, at the mirror now, pulling a small hat down over her dark little head, "and she and my aunt put up every sort of pickle and preserve you ever heard of, and they have about fifteen pairs of slippers apiece, and cross-stitch tablecloths——"

"Silver," Sylvia suggested, looking at the shining fingernails of one white hand.

"Yes—silver's good. Or china," Jane mused. "We'll go downtown to-morrow morning, Carol, and wander through Chinatown and see what we can see! Good-bye," she added, waving from the door, "I'll leave this key, Jerry. You won't be going out. We'll be right back, anyway!"

They were gone, and in the absolute silence of the room Sylvia said, drily, "That was easy."

"Want tea?" Jerome asked.

"Less," she said, considering, "less than I want to risk an inquiring waiter!"

The possibility grated on him a little, and he felt an odd hot prickling of the skin.

Sylvia sat silent, her fingers locked before her breast, her slim figure sunk into a deep chair, half facing the open window.

She looked at him speculatively, not smiling.

"Hello, Jerdy."

His rather tired and harassed face lighted suddenly.

"Hello, dear."

"Do you know what I've been feeling for the past half hour?" Sylvia asked.

Jerome's look interrogated her; he did not speak.

"Jealousy," Sylvia said.

Suddenly she was on her feet at the open window, looking down with dark and unseeing eyes at the panorama of the gray-blue city below her, with the gulls wheeling over the waterfront and little busy steamers cutting long lines of foam across the soft haze on the misted bay.

"Why should *she* have you?" she said in a low voice. "Why should *she* be your wife, coming here with you to the hotel, so complacent, so sure of herself?"

An angry sob, gritting through the words, cut them short; she fumbled, with quick, nervous white fingers, at the black at her wrist, whose fineness a transparent organdy cuff accentuated, and put a wisp of handkerchief lightly to her eyes.

Jerome came to stand beside her, but he did not touch her.

"It just—happens to be—that way," he said lamely.

Sylvia turned to him, fragrant and lovely and very close, her dark uplifted eyelashes beaded with tears.

"I want you so much!" she said in a whisper. And then, as the man continued to stare sombrely out of the window, she added, in proud quick alarm, "Don't you like me to-day, Jerdy?"

He shrugged, flung back his head with a quick impatient gesture, and laughed a little grimly.

"I always like you—too much," he answered simply, scowling.

Sylvia put both hands on his breast. Her voice was rich with pity and tenderness.

"What is it to-day, then, Jerdy?"

His restive, evading glance went about the room; Carol's dingy white bear, without which even now she would never take even the shortest trip, was on the window sill. A familiar faded photograph of Jane's mother, in a high ruched collar and with a roll of hair descending on her forehead, was on the mantel. He could not indicate Jane's bureau ivories, spread on the dressing table beyond the bedroom's open door, nor the big closet Jane's simple frocks and blue-and-white striped pajamas shared with his own overcoat and hat and night wear, but he felt them there, like living things, and Sylvia felt them, too.

"Take me down to the St. Francis, then, for tea!" she suggested imperatively.

Jerome glanced at his wrist.

"Have we time?"

"Time!" She was cut to the heart. She went to her chair and sat down again, staring blankly, vaguely before her. Instantly Jerome was on his knees at her side.

"Ah, darling, don't speak like that! Don't look like that," he pleaded, his arms about her waist, her soft fingers on his collar, and her reproachful eyes reading his face. "You can see—you can see—— I shouldn't have done this—come here to-day," he began again, as she did not speak. "It was a fool thing to do. But it seemed a chance to see you again, without all this——" He hesitated, laughed ruefully. "Without all this damn' lying and sneaking!" he finished.

"Oh, that's what it is!" Sylvia said softly, cryptically, pursing her lips, narrowing her eyes as she looked into space.

Jerome got the hurt pride in her tone.

"My dearest, *you* have nothing to do with that part of it!" he hastened to reassure her.

"Is it so hard?" the woman asked, pondering.

"Well, of course. For years I've been satisfied with only an occasional overnight stay away from home, and now—just in the past few weeks—I've made three or four trips to the city."

"Does she suspect, Jerdy?"

"Suspect! Didn't you just see her? She hasn't the faintest idea."

"Yet Jane isn't dull," Sylvia said, thoughtfully.

"Dull? Not a bit. And she used to be very jealous, poor kid. But she got over that, or something, I don't know how it was," Jerome fumbled, puzzled by it himself. "And I will put my hand in the fire to keep her from knowing!" he said under his breath. "The one thing you and I have always said," he went on, his arm about Sylvia now, and his cheek touched for a moment to the soft shining bands of her hair, "is that Jane shan't be hurt, isn't it?"

An odd light came suddenly into her narrowed eyes.

"Jerdy, do you believe persons—a man and a woman—can help loving each other?" she asked dreamily, resting her head against his shoulder, looking down, as he was, at the city below the window, and with his hand locked in hers.

"You know they can't, darling. Why, look at us!"

"Don't you think," said Sylvia in a low voice, following her line of thought, "that it's the greatest thing in the world?"

"I know it," Jerome amended it. "It has taken possession of me," he said. "I can think of nothing else."

"There *is* nothing else," Sylvia said, in a pause.

"But, my God," Jerome presently added, with a

sudden little gust of feeling, "what a dog it makes me feel!"

"I'll tell you why," Sylvia assured him. "Because you are in a false position. This—this feeling between you and me—doesn't come to everyone in this world. For a man and a woman, as perfectly matched as we are, to find each other, isn't an everyday experience. We can't treat it as if it were."

She half turned her head to look at him very seriously, and Jerome laughed as he kissed her.

"You're very cute, with your logic and your arguments!" he said fondly.

But her annoyed and dissatisfied expression did not change, and she moved her head quickly, as if she would jerk it away from his lips.

"You seem to be perfectly satisfied with the situation," she observed drily, irritatedly, "but—unfortunately—I hate to be put in a false position!"

"Ah, Silver, darling, I don't know you in this mood!" he said tenderly, reproachfully.

She did not answer directly, nor speak at all for a full minute. She continued to cling to the hand she held in both of hers, and to rest her head against his shoulder, looking out of the window.

"It's such a waste!" she muttered bitterly.

And then suddenly, as he did not speak, "Why—why—why should it be all for Jane? Why is her happiness so much more important than ours?"

"Hasn't she the—well, the right of way?" Jerome asked, still taking this little tantrum lightly, half amused and all sympathetic with her ill temper, but not really concerned.

Sylvia jerked herself loose and began to walk back and forth, her locked fingers wrung on her breast, her respiration coming with a little audible hissing.

"Oh, that makes me *wild!*" she whispered under her breath. "That makes me wild! *Jane.* Your child's governess. Why, she knows—I know—everyone knows exactly the mood in which you married her."

A few more impatient paces. Then Jerome went to her, and gathered her hands together, and spoke in the soothing voice he might have used to a child.

"Sylvia, stop it. Stop it, now. This is all nonsense. I won't let you work yourself up this way! My dear, of *course* it's a wretched situation, of *course* it's unfortunate, but what can we *do!*"

Held close, she looked at him with smouldering bright curious eyes.

"But you talk about 'the right of way,'" she said sullenly. "There's no such thing as a 'right of way'! Jane has done nothing to deserve *all* the consideration—*all* the sacrifices. When it seemed to me," Sylvia went on, "when it seemed to me that the generous thing was to step out of Garth's life, didn't I do it? To be sure," she said quickly, defensively, as Jerome smiled, "to be sure I wasn't in love with Garth, I'm not pretending I was! But I didn't particularly want a divorce. I had nothing to gain by it.

"Why, I don't have to tell you," she went on proudly, "that there are always men trying to make life interesting for me! There are always men who will follow a good-looking woman about. It was a great protection to me to be still a married woman, technically. Through my little apartment in New York," Sylvia told him, almost passionately, almost threateningly, "the most interesting men in the city come and go: the writers, the painters, and the newspaper men!"

She weakened suddenly, stopped speaking. She went to her chair and flung herself into it, one elbow on its broad arm, her chin cupped in her hand.

"Ah, my dear!" she said, in a changed tone, a tired and gentle tone, "I don't want to talk to you this way! It's not worthy—not worthy of either of us!"

"I'm so sorry——" Jerome began stupidly, inadequately. He stopped.

"Sorry!" She echoed the word on that same impatient whisper he had heard before, clicking tongue and teeth together, looking away, narrowed eyes reaching far spaces. "You force me to think of myself what no man ever made me think before, Mr. Delafield!" she added lightly.

"Sylvia—*dearest*—don't take it this way! Don't make me feel so terribly!"

There was a silence, during which she moved her eyes from the window and brought them to brood smoulderingly upon him.

"Jerry," she asked suddenly, in a quiet, businesslike tone, "is there any reason why you and I shouldn't slip off to dinner somewhere to-night?"

"Reason!" he could only echo, incredulously, with a glance about him.

"Certainly!" Sylvia said.

"Why, but—why, but—— I'm taking the girls to see Fred Stone," stammered Jerry.

"I know you are. Or *were*. But is there any reason why that plan shouldn't be changed?"

"Well—well, but my darling, how *could* it be?"

"Tell her you want to dine with me," Sylvia suggested practically, watching him.

Jerome's simple face, turned blankly toward her, was filled with puzzlement and distress.

"Why not all dine together?" he suggested brightly.

"Because I must talk to you!" Sylvia persisted.

He looked at her, trying for his former manner of gentle, amused reproof, trying to shame her by his very

affection and lenience, but showing, under the pretence, how concerned and uncomfortable he was.

"That doesn't sound like you, Sylvia," he said. "It would hurt Jane terribly!"

"Oh, Jane—Jane—Jane!" she repeated on an angry burst. "It's always Jane! Why can't it—sometimes—*sometimes!*—be me!"

Jerome sat regarding her, his eyes anxious, his forehead wrinkled, his whole face expressing the concern and sympathy he felt.

"Sylvia, you're not really angry with me, dear! Why, it would be the ruin of us all, dear, to let Jane know the truth. Poor little soul, I am confident—I know her, and I am confident—she would kill herself!"

Sylvia came across the little space between their chairs, jerked a low hassock to his side, and sat there, facing him, leaning forward to clasp both his hands, fixing her eyes on his face. Their knees touched.

"Don't expect me to be reasonable!" she said in a low, sorry voice. "I love you. It makes me wretched," she went on, "to make you unhappy, but I can't help it! I love you."

"It's only that *you're* unhappy, Sylvia," Jerome protested, after a pause during which their troubled eyes had been together.

Her proud head went up erect on the slender neck, she fastened wide eyes upon him.

"But you—you don't mean to say that *you're* contented!" she exclaimed resentfully.

"Well, no, no," he assured her quickly. "But—but I am so ridiculously and idiotically happy when I'm with you," he temporized, "that I can't worry about anything!"

It was lover's talk, and it angered her. Sylvia snatched at the first weapon she could find.

"What would happen, Jerdy, if we frankly told Jane —if we flung ourselves on her mercy?"

She saw his eyes widen slightly, saw the bitten lip and the fluctuation in colour.

"My God, Sylvia!"

"Well, why not—why not—why not!" she muttered, turning away, still holding tight to his hands.

"Dearest," he said reproachfully, "why hurt her?"

"Oh, why anything!" Sylvia exclaimed, bursting suddenly into tears. "Why hurt me? Why hurt you?"

He made no effort to comfort her; he sat silent, smitten dumb with amazement, shock, and distress, until the brief breakdown was over. Presently her tears stopped; she sniffed and dried her eyes.

"My dear, my dear," said Sylvia, leaning forward, still holding his hands. "When I think of the life we could lead, the persons we would know!"

She fell silent, perhaps a little ashamed, and Jerome was silent, too. Presently he put her hands gently aside and went to stand again at the window, and Sylvia rose, too, to walk restlessly to and fro in the shadowy room for a few minutes. Then she came to stand beside him. She slipped her hand, infinitely soft and fine, into his.

The city below the window was quite dark now; Saint Mary's cross blazed over the dim red and yellow lights of Chinatown. Little ferry boats moved to and fro across the bay, the long jetties from Oakland and Berkeley were pricked against the gloom in tiny yellow points. The world was all gray, soft and wide, and, while they watched, the autumn moon slipped up, a shining disk against the east, and floated over the city, to add her pale light to the nearer lights and drop a long streak of silver across the metal surface of the bay.

Sylvia's breast rose and fell on a long, deep sigh. The

man turned toward her and tipped her head back for his kiss.

"You are the most wonderful woman in the world!" he said. "There's nothing—nothing without you!"

"Ah-h!" she said hungrily, "that's what I want you to say!"

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN Jane came in, a few minutes later, the lights were lighted, Sylvia was gone, and Jerome was at the telephone ordering dinner. He showed a great interest in Jane's accounts of her preposterous old family, and a pleased anticipation of the birthday lunch the next day, a Saturday.

"Lunch!" said Jane. "It's a regular dinner. They always have it at one, on Saturdays and Sundays. Chickens, a ham, squash, my aunt was setting bread, two kinds of pie, crab salad—we'll sink into unconsciousness immediately afterward, you can be sure of that!"

Jerome assured her that she and Carol could sink into unconsciousness if they liked, but he—unfortunately—had a business engagement with a man tomorrow night.

"Who, Jerry dearest?"

"No one you know. An old school friend who happened to show up here in the lobby to-day."

"Jerry, but do you suppose we could get back from Grandma's in time to go to a picture, or do something, with Sylvia? It seems so mean to leave her alone all day."

"I think she's going out of town early in the morning. So why don't you and Carol stay and spend the evening with the family? They love so to have you."

"Oh, if she's not going to be here, I will!" Jane said,

relievedly. "What is it, Jerry?" she asked, looking curiously into his face, puzzled.

"Nothing, dear."

"You looked as if you were going to say something."

"No."

"Well, you looked as if you were."

She went about the grateful task of making herself pretty for dinner and the evening, calling directions to Carol; as eagerly interested in the dinner that was presently brought upstairs as was the child.

They were both hungry; Jerome could not eat. Wife and daughter hung on either arm as they went downstairs, at eight o'clock, through the enormous softly lighted, well-peopled lobby to the motor car. Strains of music were floating through the opened dining-room door; Jane's cheeks blazed and her eyes shone. "I love it!" she said, following Jerome out to the wide entrance, where their car waited amid blowing veils of fog.

But later, when they had returned from a thrilling evening and she was reading in bed, she looked off her book to say, "it'll be good to get back to the dogs and the shore and Storm House on Tuesday, won't it, Jerry?"

"I wish to God we were there now!" he wanted to say. But he dared not. So he merely looked up from his own book and smiled.

"When does Sylvia go, Jerry?"

"What made you think of her?" He wondered if Jane had seen the thought in his eyes.

"Just wondering how long she is going to be alone here."

"She goes Wednesday or Thursday, I believe."

And his uninterrupted thoughts of her went on. Sylvia was under this same roof, to-night, she was upstairs just over their heads.

Jerome looked at the telephone. It would bring her voice to him within a few seconds. By stretching out his hand he could take it. His brain buzzed with the imagined sound of his own voice ringing through the room, "Mrs. Bellamy, please."

"I'll call you," the operator would say.

Jerome started, glanced at Jane. Had he said any of this out loud? No; Jane was serenely turning pages.

Even while he watched her she slammed the covers of her book together and dropped it on the floor, smiled at him sleepily, dragged out an extra pillow and threw it away, snapped off her lamp, and settled herself for the night, lying flat on her face, with one arm embracing her pillow.

Jerome watched her for a few minutes and then went noiselessly into the adjoining sitting room, where a cot had been placed for Carol, who was sprawled out luxuriously, fast asleep, with her pajama-clad little form entirely free of the bedclothes, except where a pale, clean hotel blanket was hooked over a bare foot.

Her father straightened out the bed patiently, put out the light, opened a second window, and saw the feverish lights of the Trovatore Restaurant flaming and fading on the dark. The big hotel room was warm, and lighted with pale squares of reflected light, through the transom, through the window, through the door that led into Jane's room.

Dang-dang-dang. The Powell Street car was meeting a delay with its usual staccato clamour. Jerome stood by the window for a while, then he turned abruptly and went soundlessly toward the hall door. He opened it and walked swiftly along the long, lighted corridor.

His heart sang. Miraculously, he was free. And instantly life was wonderful. He would see Sylvia again, though it were only for a moment.

He scorned the elevator, went up the angled marble stairway with flying feet. And when he reached it her door was unlocked, and opened to the soft turning of his fingers.

On Monday afternoon Sylvia came into Jane's apartment to find Jane happily weary after a morning's shopping in Chinatown, whose flimsy parcels and collapsing boxes were visible on all sides.

"Jerry's just started for the park with Carol," Jane explained, looking up and smiling but not changing her luxurious attitude. She lay stretched on a davenport, her feet up, her hands locked on a velvet pillow behind her head.

Sylvia took a big chair near her.

"Where do you go, when you get to New York, Sylvia?"

"My little apartment—it's up on Central Park."

"And is there someone there to make it comfortable for you?"

"Oh, yes. I have a maid." There was a pause, during which Jane shut her eyes and so missed the change of expression on the other's face. Then deliberately, clearly, Sylvia said, "I'm trying to persuade Jerry to come on."

"He hates crowds, trains, subways—everything ugly and poor, like factories and slums," Jane contributed indifferently, not opening her eyes.

"He *thinks* he does!" Sylvia countered. "But those things are very different from what he supposes."

Jane opened her eyes widely, and smiled.

"But he's happy!" she offered simply.

"Isn't it, perhaps, that you *think* he's happy?" Sylvia asked.

Her tone brought the other woman erect, feet to the

floor, eyes filled with amused, incredulous surprise that held a tinge of uneasiness. Jane, after a bewildered pause, said slowly, "Why—don't *you?*"

Sylvia appeared to consider this, her head tipped slightly to one side.

"I *know* he's not," she said then, distinctly.

"You *know* he's not!" Jane murmured in a vague, dazed voice. She looked at Sylvia, stared at a spot on the carpet, wet her lips, and looked up at Sylvia again. "How do you mean?" she asked blankly.

Sylvia had walked to the open window, through which she was looking down upon the gray city. Saint Mary's bell chimed a slow three times in the long silence.

Then Jane whispered again sharply, "How do you mean Jerry isn't happy?"

The other woman glanced over her shoulder, spoke briefly, looked out of the window again.

"I mean—just that."

Jane was breathing hard, trying to smile. She looked at Sylvia blankly, looked down, her staring eyes moving from one of the rug's dim designs to another.

"You mean—he told you?" she stammered.

Instead of answering, Sylvia asked another question. She came quickly to Jane's side, on the davenport, and sat down, and caught Jane's lifeless and unresponsive hands in hers, looking earnestly into her puzzled eyes.

"Don't you understand?" she said wistfully.

Jane, her nostrils dilating, her lips tightly shut, raised her heavy, puzzled gaze to look at Sylvia. She moved her hands restlessiy, freed them, knotted them in her lap. Her square, boyish shoulders were slightly bowed now, there was a quality young, forlorn, lean, and perplexed about her that went to Sylvia's heart. She could see the little beads of perspiration prick through the fine

down of Jane's low forehead; under Jane's healthy tan the red colour had faded, leaving her quiet and pale.

"I don't think I do understand," she said slowly.

The other woman continued to watch her, without speaking.

"No, I don't understand," Jane repeated, raising her eyes.

Sylvia continued to regard her quizzically, intently, a slight frown drawing the fine dark lines of her brows together; her amber eyes were pulsing with eager light, the lids half lowered over them.

There was a long silence in the big hotel room. Down beyond the city whistles and horns droned on the bay. Long streamers of fog were beginning to creep in through the Golden Gate, and to muffle the surface of the gray water.

"What are you trying to tell me, Sylvia!" Jane asked suddenly, impatiently, flinging up her head. "I don't understand you!"

"I think you do," said Sylvia.

Another silence. Then Jane said restively, "You're talking nonsense! How do you mean Jerry's not happy? That's nonsense. He *is* happy. He's one of the happiest persons in the world!"

And after looking with dawning light and suspicion in her eyes at Sylvia's eloquent face, she added, "Did you see him when he came up to San Francisco last week?"

"Every time," Sylvia answered simply.

"Every time!" Jane began to breathe fast again. "You mean—you came down from Nevada?"

"I never went to Nevada."

The younger woman's eyes widened, stared blindly into the other's face. The last shred of colour faded from her cheeks.

"When he came to see Liebermond?" she whispered.

"Jane, don't feel too badly," Sylvia said gently. "I'm —you see I'm Liebermond, myself."

"You!" Jane breathed sharply, tonelessly. And she was still as Sylvia was still.

After a while Jane bunched her fingers at her lips, and beat them there, a little dry whimper shaking her mouth and moving the flanges of her nose.

"No—no—no!" she muttered, on a soft protesting note, like a small animal in pain. Her eyes roved the room restlessly; she saw Carol's dingy white bear on the mantel and the neat little desk, with its green blotters and extension telephone, and she felt the cooling fog that came in at the opened windows, and heard the horns on the bay. But she was conscious of none of it.

Suddenly she said, "I see!" and got up, and walked to the window. But she could not stand there; she went swiftly about the room, like something seeking air. Sylvia sat perfectly still.

"I see," Jane said in a dry voice, sitting down again next to Sylvia, her handkerchief balled in her fingers, her eyes tearless and bright. "But fortunately for me," she added, desperately calm and resolutely gallant, "fortunately for me, I don't believe you!"

Still Sylvia did not speak, but continued to regard her with speculative and sympathetic eyes.

"It's not true!" Jane whispered, as if to herself, looking away.

"Don't think," Sylvia said, averting her own eyes, speaking in a low tone, "that *we're* happy about it."

Jane stared at her, stupefied. Then she bowed her body forward on her knees and covered her face with her hands.

"Oh, my God—my God—my God!" Sylvia heard her say.

Neither moved for a long minute. Then Jane sat up, swallowing. Already there was a terrible change in her face, and it looked haggard and despairing. Her sturdy little boyish brown hand plucked feverishly at the fringe on a plush pillow.

"I don't believe it!" she repeated, and fell into sudden, staring thought, caught, in spite of herself, in a web of unanswerable memories. Pain pulsed visibly, darkening and brightening, in her blue eyes. "He wouldn't do that!" she muttered.

"He has been miserable," Sylvia said, briefly eloquent.

Jane's only answer was an agonized spurt of wild tears, tears that shook her violently. She controlled them almost instantly, swallowing hard, flinging back her head. When she spoke again her face was glazed with salt water, and her voice unsteady.

"Do you think Jerome loves *you?*" she demanded proudly, coldly.

Sylvia extended a quick, soft hand, and pressed it over Jane's hand.

"I think so," she answered simply.

The other freed her hand, wiped her eyes fiercely, and sat staring vaguely into space again.

"You may think so, Sylvia," she said, after a silence, in a low, controlled voice. "He may think so," she further admitted, frowning, drawing down her upper lip and pressing it with her lower teeth, to fight back tears, "but I know him. He loves his home, and his study there, and Carol—and yes, me," Jane floundered on, suddenly overwhelmed again, her eyes streaming and her whole body rocking with grief.

Writhing, she fled into the other room. Sylvia, looking thoughtfully into space, did not move a muscle until Jane returned, some minutes later. She had washed

her face with cold water and swallowed a glassful; her hair was damp and trim from recent combing.

She came quite simply to a chair and sat down and faced Sylvia frankly, her nose reddened, her eyes wet and swollen.

"Well, what to do?" she said bravely. And with an uncertain smile and a little shrug she added, "There's *nothing* to do."

Sylvia did not speak, and presently Jane added, "If it makes him unhappy, I'm sorry. I'm—*bitterly*—sorry. And I'm sorry for you, Sylvia. I know it is just as hard for you. For myself——" Her lips shook. "For myself, I won't say anything," she went on, a little thickly. "But—you know Jerry, Sylvia," she said. "He wouldn't—he wouldn't hurt Carol or me for anything in this world!" Jane stopped, unable to go on.

"No," the other woman agreed quickly, "I don't think he would!"

Jane had fallen into deep thought; her eyes were far away.

"I never dreamed it!" she said in a whisper. And then in a half-audible tone, as if she merely voiced her thought, "*Jerry.*"

Sylvia could find nothing with which to end a long silence except, "It does happen, Jane."

"What happens?" Jane challenged her sharply, looking up.

"That a man and a woman find each other—find great love—too late," Sylvia said, steadily.

"Is that what you and Jerry think has happened!" Jane said, with a shaken and scornful laugh.

Sylvia raised surprised eyes, a little shocked by her manner.

"That's what we *know* has happened, Jane."

"Well, it hasn't," Jane said flatly. "I'll tell *you* what

has happened," she went on, gaining self-control with every word. "You saw a good deal of each other down there at the ranch, and he is attractive—and you are beautiful—and you've got a sort of—of high-school propinquity crush!" This contemptuously. "That's all it is, and that's all it ever can be! *Love*. Why, that's not love!" she rushed on. "Do you suppose, if I told Jerry that you'd told me all this, this afternoon, if I offered him his freedom, told him——" The tide of tears was rising again, she fought it back. "If I told him that Carol and I could take care of ourselves, that I wanted him—*wanted* him to go to you—go East, live in New York, meet everybody, all the writers and actors you were always telling him about——"

Anger dried her eyes, she paced the floor, always facing Sylvia, inundating her with angry words.

"What do you suppose he'd do then?" she demanded fiercely. "Leave us? You *know* he wouldn't! You know that it would only break his heart. He'd come back to Storm House and make it up to me—*prove* to me——"

A sudden rush of grief and self-pity choked her, and she turned her back to Sylvia and put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I agree with you," Sylvia observed quietly, after a space.

Jane turned to stare at her in surprise, and weakened into tears again.

"Well," she sobbed, "then why did you *tell* me!"

"I don't know," the other woman confessed simply. But after a moment's consideration she added, "I suppose—perhaps—I thought that there might be some way to solve it; some way in which all three of us might not be so unhappy."

"I was happy," Jane muttered resentfully, coming back to her seat.

"You wouldn't have been, Jane," Sylvia said quickly. "You would have known that something was wrong anyway."

"I *didn't!*" Jane said defiantly again.

"But I'm going away, now," Sylvia reminded her mildly.

"Oh, and you think——" Jane spoke in quick anger, looking at her with swollen, smouldering eyes, "you think that will make a difference in the way I feel, knowing this?"

"It might," Sylvia conceded thoughtfully.

"It won't!" said Jane.

"I thought you might—knowing how you love him—" Sylvia began, speaking with difficulty herself, and with the first tears pricking her own eyes—"I thought you might——" She stopped.

"Give him to you?" Jane stammered, crying uncontrollably, but fighting still, her head flung back against the upholstered high top of her chair, the tears flowing fast under the wet handkerchief she pressed to her eyes.

The other woman did not speak, and Jane once more controlled her shock and despair and subsided into silence, only occasionally sniffling and blowing her nose.

"I'll tell you something," she said presently, in a thick but steady voice. "I'll tell you something, Sylvia. If you think he would leave Carol and me, you don't know him. But to prove it to you, to prove to you that I am not just a selfish *pig*, about this, why—why don't you let me talk to Jerry? I'll tell him that you've told me this, and I'll offer him——"

For a minute the words stopped short. Then she

added proudly, "I'm no coward! If he wants you, and you want him, it isn't going to kill me."

Sylvia glanced at her obliquely, bit her lip, shook her fair head.

"He mustn't know that I've talked to you," she said.

Jane went into the other room, and came back with a wet towel, with which she bathed her exhausted and agitated face, quite regardless of the effect.

"He'll have to know," she said firmly, defiantly.

"What good will that do?" Sylvia asked.

"What—what good will it do?" Jane repeated in surprise. "Why, it will mean that if he loves you—which he doesn't!—and wants to go to you—which he won't!—he'll know that I am not going to stand in his way."

"By telling him, you *do* stand in his way," Sylvia said coolly, slowly.

Jane stared, silent.

"How do you mean?" she asked sharply, after the pause.

"Why——" Sylvia shrugged, spreading open her hands. "Why, what can he do, if you tell him," she asked, "except deny it, and throw away his happiness? Yes, and his future, Jane, and the friends and the fame he might have? Of *course* he'd go back with you to Storm House, of *course* he'd say it was only a passing thing. He'd say that he was not really in love with me!

"But just the same," Sylvia went on softly, as if to herself, in the silence, "just the same, he would know that it is *not* a passing thing. And he *does* love me. He has never loved before—you know that! He didn't love Elsie—she loved him. And for you—my dear, my dear, you know what a fatherly, brotherly sort of love *that* was—that is. To me—to me," Sylvia went on, her shining amber eyes fixed on space, her voice hushed to ecstasy, "can you imagine what he gives to me?"

"I don't want to imagine it!" Jane said shortly, swallowing.

"Shall I tell you?" Sylvia persisted, eyes upon her.

"I—I don't want to know!" Jane stammered. Her hands were clasped, she looked wildly, miserably about her, with dry, frightened eyes.

"It's all waiting for him, there—friends, fame, and fortune," Sylvia went on, with a gesture of her hand to the east, beyond the bay, beyond the Berkeley hills, far, far over the mountains, asleep in the quiet afternoon.

"And you!" Jane said, in a tense whisper.

"And me." Sylvia said the little words simply, reverently, and immediately afterward dropped her face into her two white hands.

After a long pause Jane said, once more, in a desperate, stubborn voice:

"I don't believe it!"

"Look here," Sylvia began suddenly, taking down her hands, leaning forward on the davenport. "Look here! Suppose you go down with him to Storm House to-morrow, and I start East the next day. And suppose that after a few days, or a week, or two weeks, I send for him?"

"Send for him?" Jane repeated, almost inaudibly, with whitening lips.

"Yes!" Sylvia said recklessly, imperiously. "I send for him. And suppose he goes to you, down there at Storm House, and tells you that his publisher has sent for him—what then? Suppose he tells you that he must go East at once, immediately, and that he will send for you and Carol if he is delayed there? Would you believe *then?*"

"You think you could do that!" Jane said contemptuously. But she was trembling.

"Perhaps I couldn't," Sylvia agreed moderately.

They looked steadily at each other. The silence between them rose quietly, like tide water; there seemed, to Jane at least, to be nothing more to say in all the world. She felt dizzy and tired and bewildered; tears had dried on her cheeks and left them burned and hot, her head ached, her mouth was dry.

After a long while she stood up and put her hand on the back of her chair to steady herself, and said lifelessly, "I'm going for a walk."

Sylvia looked at her curiously, even a little uneasily.

"Will you dare to try that, Jane?" she persisted, reluctant but merciless.

"You mean, wait and see what Jerry would do if you sent for him?" Jane asked with a dispassionate, sombre look.

"Yes."

"I don't know what I would dare, or wouldn't dare!" Jane said coldly. She went into the bedroom, and Sylvia, presently following her to the door, saw her putting on her hat.

Jane glanced over her shoulder at her with a sort of smouldering hostility in her reddened eyes. She did not speak, she kept her back turned to her.

"I don't know whether I've done the right thing or not!" Sylvia faltered, her own eyes suddenly brimming.

Still silence.

"Good-bye," Sylvia said hesitatingly.

"Good-bye."

Jane walked by her and through the other room and out into the hall. Sylvia, left alone in Jerome's apartment, stood for a second, flushed and irresolute, and then followed her, closing the hall door behind her. She could see Jane's small square figure moving ahead, but she made no attempt to overtake her, and Jane did not turn around.

CHAPTER XVIII

COOL airs flowed about Storm House, a cool sunset light enveloped it, when the Delafields arrived home late in the following afternoon. The delicious pungent cleanness of the autumn country scented the wide rooms, as did the snapping wood fires and the jars of bronze and white chrysanthemums that Too Fah had set about everywhere. The place looked wide and comfortable and was wrapped in heavenly silence. Even the windmill's wheel was not turning to-night; there was a swift movement of blackbirds among the shrubs in the side garden, and a wild scramble of dogs through the whitewashed farm gate.

Jane moved as a woman in a dream. It was all familiar—heartrendingly dear—it was home. But her heart and soul were out in desolate spaces, frightened and alone. Only with the most resolute effort did she keep the constant tears from her eyes.

Somehow, she served dinner; everyone was tired, and went early to bed. Even Jerome, the late reader, was sound asleep by ten o'clock.

It was then that Jane slipped across from her bed and came to the side of his, to kneel there and lay her face against his hand. He was lying on his side, with his wave of fair hair tossed loosely off his forehead and the collar of his sleeping jacket open to show his finely moulded throat.

There was pale moonlight in the room; Jane strained her eyes to see the man's face. She held his limp hand in both of hers; she did not cry, nor make any sound.

Jerome stirred sleepily, roused.

"Jane, what are you doing?"

"Only—saying my prayers, Jerry."

"Good little Jane!" he muttered, and was off to sleep again. She could cry now, softly, restrainedly; she took the edge of the sheet, and gently wiped her tears from his hand.

The next day was better, and the next better again, and so a dozen perfect days went by, and the fear grew less. Jerry was always happy, always busy, always ready to praise the familiar, beloved routine of Storm House. Joe Chickering came over to lunch on the terrace, and Jane and Jerry walked down the two rough miles of shore that lay between Storm House and the studio barn where Joe lived and worked, to dine with him. A dreamy last glimpse of Indian Summer warmed the days into actual hotness; but there were wood fires at night and in the crisp, cool, dewy mornings.

And Jane said to herself, in her fearful and watching heart, that if this serenity and happiness went on for a few more days, for three weeks, she would tell Jerry all about it; that Sylvia had betrayed his secret, that she knew who "Liebermond" was, and that if he had been suffering since Sylvia went away, she, Jane, had been suffering, too.

Then came a certain cloudless afternoon when the four of them—for Joe was there—were sitting down on the rocks after a hard scramble. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon; the tide was coming in, brimming majestically and spreading in fingers of foam in the quiet pools over the rocks. Jane was on Jerry's right, as he sat on the sand with his back propped against a sun-warmed boulder, and Carol on his left. He had an arm about each, and as the conversation drifted idly to and fro, Jane felt, for the first time since the re-

turn to Storm House, a certain dawning confidence and comfort, a relieved conviction that Sylvia had exaggerated a perfectly natural situation into something enormous and menacing. She rested her head, with a pony's little rubbing motion, against her husband's shoulder, and Joe Chickering, lying idly in the hot sand a few feet away, congratulated her upon her colour.

"You looked tired to death when you got back, Jane," said Joe, "but now you're beginning to look all right again."

"Maybe I'm a country mouse," Jane suggested meekly.

It was then that Jerry, groping for a letter that he tossed to Joe, said suddenly, with an air of tardy recollection, "Listen—you people. I forgot this: I may have to start East in a day or two."

A brassy pallor turned the world sick to Jane. Her heart plunged, and her mouth filled with salt water. She did not speak.

"What?" Joe said, looking up surprised from a close study of the white sand.

"May. I don't know yet." Jerome jogged the shoulder against which Jane was resting. "Do you hear that?" he asked. "You may be a widow for a few weeks."

"Only a few weeks, huh? What's up?" Joe asked unsuspiciously. Jane did not move a muscle, did not speak. She felt a wave of vertigo sweep over her; her throat was thick, and her breath had stopped.

"Oh, publisher's stuff!" Jerry answered. "It isn't exactly an order, you'll see by that letter Joe has," he went on. "But it was a pretty strong hint that I am needed there. It saves them a lot of time and work to have their people on the spot. What do you think about that, Jenny?" Jerome ended, with another movement of his shoulder.

"Why," said her voice, trembling and faint and far away, "if they want you——"

"Well, they do!" he said decidedly, in the pause.

"Would we go, Daddy?" Carol demanded, freeing herself from his arm and squaring about to face him.

"I think not. I'd have to start to-morrow," Jerome stated bravely. "If I do it, I might as well pretend to like it!"

He imagined himself, safe in his little compartment on the eastward moving train. Prairies and mountains flying by and vanishing, and the big foundries and cities —brick houses, avenues of trees, timid flutters of cottony snow taking their places. Cold sooty air smiting his face at the way stations, women in furs driving bumping motor cars over snow.

Twelve years since he had seen it! His heart rose with a pleasurable thrill at the thought. He pictured the crowded, humming streets of the biggest city, saw his own taxi racing northward, past the theatres and the apartment houses, past the hungry mouths of the subways, into the bare autumnal park, with its last leaves fallen, and toward the big, warm, dimly lighted apartment house where Sylvia was.

"Let me know if there is any hope, my dearest," said the letter that was over his heart. "For I am a lonesome, heartsick, bewildered exile, staring out of my uncurtained windows, trying to take an interest in unpacking, eating meals that all taste alike, waiting for letters that don't come! I want you so—and I need you so—and Jerdy, Jerdy, Jerdy, I love you so!"

Thinking of these things, he was but vaguely conscious that Jane had gotten to her feet and was walking slowly to the house. He was laughing like a boy and comforting Carol when he followed her, fifteen minutes later; he stopped at the telephone downstairs to send

his telegraph message to his publisher. It was all convincing enough; Sylvia had foreseen even this moment. Indeed, sometimes her prescience almost alarmed him.

"Write your publisher now," she had said to him, during their last talk at the hotel a few weeks before, "and tell him that you are coming on. Of course he'll turn the whole world upside down for you. He's never seen you—you can imagine how curious he'll be. He'll either write you, or wire you, and whichever he does, you can show it to Jane. And then wire him, and the next day go into Santa Lolita and wire me."

So Jerome cheerfully telephoned his message to the unsuspecting confederate and went on upstairs to find Jane, pale but quite composed, busy with his wardrobe.

"Shock to you, Jenny?" Jerome asked, anxious to discover her feelings.

"I don't—think so," she answered, not turning from the bureau.

"I didn't hear you, darling!" Jerome was at the closet, hauling forth his big suitcase.

"Well, you've never met those people—your publishers," Jane reminded him steadily. "It's about time."

"If it wasn't that he's in such a hurry, I'd wait a few days and take you and the Infanta," Jerry apologized, very busy with straps and pockets.

"Oh, no, I wouldn't go!" Jane assured him quickly.

"You really wouldn't, dear?" He was trying to be careless and conversational about it, but something in her rigid, determined calm made him faintly uneasy.

"No," she said. And then indicating the handkerchiefs and socks and neckties with which she had been busy, she diverged, with a cold, pale smile, "Of course, you might be able to buy anything you needed in New York! But—just automatically—I've been sorting these out."

"I'd much rather not have to buy things," he agreed gratefully, still trying to get a clue to her mood. "It's rotten, to leave you here alone," he began irresolutely.

"Carol and I will manage very nicely," she assured him unemotionally.

"If I should be delayed, for I only plan to spend about a week there," Jerry said cheerfully, "do you suppose you girls could come on?"

"Oh, yes!" Jane answered, without enthusiasm.

"You really wouldn't dread the responsibility, dear?"

"No."

"You're a wonder!" he told her, uncomfortable eyes fixed upon the sturdy, boyish figure, the drooping dark head, and the busy, small hands. But there was no answering spark, none of her usual glowing, delighted reception of his praises to-day.

He tried to get her to smile; he laughed himself, trying to make her laugh, over check and account books, after dinner. She and Carol were to spend all the money they possibly could.

"We will. We'll be reckless," Jane promised. But quietly, sadly, without interest or anticipation.

He was going up to his cabin, when she went to bed, "to finish some last letters and lick things into shape," he told her. The visit was really to cover a flying trip to the telegraph office in Santa Lolita, after a stay in his workshop only long enough to make sure that no betraying scrap of Sylvia's writing was left in desk or file. His big suitcase, filled, and with a new book on top for easy finding in the train, stood open on the table in Jane's room; the Eastern train went through Santa Lolita at half-past eight o'clock in the morning, and that meant a half-past seven o'clock breakfast, and an early start.

There would be small time for painful farewells in the

morning, and Jerome was glad of it. But just before he left her, on that last night, there were a few hard minutes; they shook him more than he would have believed possible, with this intoxicating prospect of New York and fame and friendships and Sylvia so close ahead.

Suddenly, Jane seemed to him so crushed, so mortally wounded and subdued, that he put his big hands on her shoulders and brought her face about so that he could see it, and made her raise her heavy, serious blue eyes to his own.

"Why, look here, Jenny!" he said, half scolding and half surprised. "If this means so much to you, dear, if you feel so badly, I'll not go. Or I'll wait for you and Carol. I had no idea."

For one instant she clung to him, brown hands clutching his coat lapels, breath coming short and deep, eyes clinging like drowning eyes to his own.

"Ah, Jerry, my dearest—my dearest—don't go!" she whispered, choking.

He looked down at her a minute, and she saw the laughter and the light fade out of his gray eyes.

"But of course I won't go, if you feel that way!" he said briefly, with a shrug. He took his hands from her shoulders and, walking to the opened suitcase, began to take out the articles that were packed in the tray: playing cards, books, the little celluloid soapbox with the new paper-wrapped cake inside, his eyeglass case, his gloves.

Jane watched him, her lower lip slightly bitten, her eyes narrow.

"No, of course you must go!" she said clearly, firmly, after a minute. "Of course you must go!"

And after that, even on the station platform, in the cold gray early morning, she did not break again. She raised her firm, cold, rosy face for his good-bye kiss

with much of Carol's childish impersonality. Joe was standing with them. Jane had her arms about Carol's shoulder when Jerome looked from his compartment window and saw them waving their farewells, she appeared to be saying something to Carol, he could not see her face.

When the train was gone, they got into the motor car and went back to Los Antonios. And Jane stopped in the market and bought whatever Hong had wanted, so much of this, so much of that. They picked up Carol's intimate friend, "Thinthia Thimthon," and Carol and Thinthia were permitted to range at large through the beguiling aisles of the five-and-ten-cent store and buy small china dolls and ribbon and embroidery with which to dress them.

A gray dull day. There appeared to be an enchantment over Los Antonios. Voices sounded strangely in the quiet morning; most folk were still in their houses, the streets and the markets were empty at half-past nine. Jane went home. Permissions and privileges were extended to Carol and Thinthia, and Jane went upstairs, to make her bed and Jerry's bed and put the big room in order.

All the time she felt as if her heart were bleeding, trickling away. There was a deadly weakness and stillness upon her.

"Maybe I'm dying; I hope I am!" thought Jane.

When the room was all in order, she put two or three sticks into the stove, and put Jerry's pillow and her own on her bed, and flung herself down. The top pillow was scented faintly with shaving soap and clean, sharp verbena toilet water. Jane jerked it out, and put her own pillow on top.

She lay there, staring at the ceiling, until Too Fah came aggrievedly upstairs to say that the luncheon gong

had twice been sounded, and littygir hungly. The little girls were indeed hungry. They were in their places when Jane went downstairs, ravenous after a morning on the farm.

Chicken pie and cornbread and cauliflower and tomato salad and prune shortcake.

"All the thingth I like!" exulted Thinthia.

"Jane, can we dress up after lunch?" Carol asked.

"Why do you call your mother 'Jane,' Carol?" the small guest asked.

"Because Carol's real mother died when she was just a little girl, five years old," Jane explained.

"But I love her more than I ever did my mother!" Carol said defiantly, in one of her rare bursts of devotion. And immediately, with her own charming little dignity, she got up and came about to Jane, and putting both arms tight about her neck, she rubbed her face against Jane's affectionately and murmured, with her eyes shut, "She's a sweet—sweet—sweet!"

Jane said nothing. But she tipped her head back for the embrace, and shut her own eyes, feeling the hard, painful tears prick under her lashes.

After lunch she went upstairs and lay on her bed again, staring, staring vaguely into space, not conscious of thought. The room grew cold, and Carol and Thinthia came upstairs and put more wood into the stove, idling happily about, washing hands and faces, chattering as they lighted the lights, and finally flinging themselves wearily on either side of Jane with the eternal query, "How soon is dinner?"

Dinner was, fortunately, soon. Jane was vaguely conscious of serving their soup; she answered them, she smiled at them. And then it was night. And presently cold dawn was in the room again.

One day she dragged herself down to the shore, think-

ing dully, "If I don't make some effort I will be ill. I must take a brisk walk!"

But when she reached the strand, a sort of sickness came over her, a dreary sense of futility and exhaustion, and after sitting on a big rock, staring, forever staring into space, for perhaps half an hour, she went slowly, lamely, up to her room again.

The club had its Thanksgiving Harvest Home, the young president in the chair. Mrs. Keith Cutler sang two numbers, (a) and (b), and Mrs. Reuben Diamond managed the usual play. The Camp Fire Girls contributed tableaux—one representing the Indians and the Pilgrims, and one a sort of allegorical dream of California's future.

Old man Trott died, and Jane Delafield went to the funeral; she went to the Foster wedding, and never failed in the Tuesday visit to the Soldiers' Hospital at Santa Lolita. There was a new Mexican baby over at the farm, and often she went through the whitewashed gate, in the early winter afternoons, and sat holding it in the stifling lair that was its home, her cool forefinger locked in the baby's wet, hot, fat brown hand.

And all the time she knew that she was dead. Joe Chickering had been summoned to a sick mother in Massachusetts, the days at Storm House were long and empty and filled with strange noises.

Lying on her bed, in these cold, windless days, when frost etched white patterns on the stubble and the cows, loitering home at four o'clock for the milking, broke ice in the road ruts, Jane listened to the strange symphony of the winter country house.

She could hear Hong shuffling to and fro in the kitchen, and hear the pound of his iron. She heard creakings, vague and irregular snappings of expanding wood, in the old wainscots, and the pipings of gulls, flying

low, over the roof. Now and then a piece of furniture in the halls, or in the rooms downstairs, cracked loudly, or a log, turned to ash, fell in the stove with a soft rushing sound, and more than once a mouse squeaked, or she heard the busy gnawing, deep in the walls, of sharp, invisible teeth.

And always, over and under the other noises, there was the soft rushing and swelling of the sea, rising, brimming, receding, dragging pebbles back with it as it slid in crossing and intersecting circles from the strand.

But all these hardly seemed sound to her dreamy, half-conscious state. Rather they seemed a sort of composite silence, a great breathing void of whose details she was but dimly aware. They entered her chamber distantly, confusedly; Jane heard them without hearing them, recognized them without dragging herself from the deeps in which her soul walked alone.

Sometimes she cried, not rebelliously nor violently now, but quietly and patiently, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes. The tears would run down her face for a few minutes, and her mouth work helplessly, and then she would be still again, her cheeks shining wet, her handkerchief a sopping ball, her eyes once more fixed apathetically on the gray ceiling.

More than once in the evening she attempted to write to Jerome, to thank him for their wonderful years together, to tell him how truly she wanted him to be happy. But the thought of Sylvia would arise as she wrote, of Sylvia's beauty and fineness and charm—Sylvia, who had everything Jane had not—and suffocating, Jane would push the paper aside before the bitterness and reproach could creep in. "I only wish that you had told me," she wrote, "I wish you had not let me realize it all by myself when you went away! I was watching you

—hoping—hoping that you couldn't hurt me like that! Somehow I felt that if you *did* go, you'd tell me first."

This letter was destroyed, like so many others. In the end Jane wrote to Sylvia:

"He gave me the greatest happiness of my life. Everything I am I owe to Jerry. I want him to be happy. If ever the occasion comes, I want him to know that, and that I understand."

And in a postscript, stained so often with her tears that she had to rewrite the letter over and over again,

"If you really love him, if he wants me to do anything to set him free, he has only to write."

Meanwhile, as Christmas drew on, Jerry, unconscious of her knowing, and confident all was well, did write her. Jane would read the kindly letters with a bitter twist to her mouth, and with a surging heart, and afterward destroy them—burn them, as if the mere sight of them stung her. Innocent, simple Jerry, who never dreamed that she understood, and who could write her cheerful, affectionate descriptions of his experiences in the city, the men and women he met, and that he had "seen Sylvia," "had tea at Sylvia's," or that "Sylvia sent love."

When such a letter came she would be sad for hours. She would lay its pages against her face, and shut her eyes, and whisper, "Ah, Jerry—Jerry, not to me! My darling, *don't!*"

The days went on and on and on, growing darker and colder and shorter, and Jane grew thin and silent and rarely smiled, except when she spoke to Carol. She and the child went in to the old cottage on San José Avenue in San Francisco for Christmas—a strange, painful blur to Jane, a bewildering time of unsensed words and long periods of dullness, of stupor. She had

no particular reason to suppose herself inadequate, however; Carol had an uproariously good time, and the old persons all did a great deal of eating, laughing, and talking. They told her, to be sure, that she looked "peaked" and "run down," and Grandma shrewdly opined that she knew a girl who missed her husband, but that was all.

Jane and Carol were back in Storm House on New Year's Day, and Jane found three letters from Jerome. He couldn't believe that he had missed Christmas at home, in that queer world of snow and crowds and excitement and extravagance, and he was either going to get back in a few days now or Jane must come on and join him. Had the Christmas box reached her? Sylvia had helped him pack it. He hadn't had any word from Jane herself, and it made him a little anxious. Was everything all right?

"He must be simple!" she thought wearily, crushing the hurting words together, watching the flame leap up from the back log to welcome them. "Other men do it," she mused, half aloud, "other men think nothing of it, Jerry. But not you!"

And lying on her bed, she went back to her daydreaming again.

CHAPTER XIX

THIS for the first three days of the new, sad year. On the fourth, she roused from a light doze to see old Dr. Graham walk unceremoniously in.

"Doctor! Did you knock?" Jane dragged herself up on an elbow, ran spread fingers through her tumbled hair, dragged the fat satiny comforter over her stockinged feet.

"Doctors don't knock," said the old man comfortably. He sat down in a chair beside the bed and beamed at her through his spectacles.

Jane blinked; wondered how red her eyes were; smiled hospitably.

"Mrs. Graham with you?"

"No, I'm making a professional call," the old man said. And he added, quietly, "Hong sent for me."

"Hong!" Jane echoed, amazed.

The visitor nodded seriously.

"Well, the nerve of that old man!" Jane exclaimed with a laugh. "He's been worrying terribly about me," she explained, her face sobering; "he's been trotting up here with soup and milk and I don't know what! But this is going pretty far."

"Why has he been worrying, my dear?" asked Dr. Graham.

Her eyes watered; she smiled with a suddenly trembling mouth.

"Well, I've been feeling badly," she faltered.

"Since Jerry went away, eh?" The glasses flashed in

the late wintry sunshine as the doctor bent his shrewd gaze upon her.

"Just about."

"Does he know you don't feel well?" the physician pursued, after a long scrutiny, during which Jane smiled as innocently, as naturally, into his face, as her self-control would permit.

"He's busy in New York. I don't worry him!" Jane said gallantly.

"How long's he be'n away, now, Jane?" demanded the old Vermonter.

"This—let's see. This is the eleventh week."

Doctor Graham reached an experienced old hirsute hand for her pulse.

"Sleeping pretty well?"

"Only pretty well."

"And lying here crying all day, is that it?"

"I guess I'm an awful baby," Jane confessed.

"Look here," said the old man. "Do you know Jerome isn't coming back, or do you just think maybe he won't?"

It drove straight into the heart of her citadel, past all defences. Jane caught at the old hand, clasped it tight, and shutting her eyes, whispered piteously, "I know it!"

"H'm!" said Jim Graham drily. And for a long time there was silence in the bedroom. The dying daylight grew redder and redder, and dropped on the wall, and still the old man sat there patting Jane's hand, and still Jane lay quietly, her hand pressed tightly over her eyes, her body stretched face upward on the bed.

"It's Mrs. Bellamy, I suppose?" the doctor presently asked abruptly. And in his secret heart he conceded that his wife was always right in her intuitions.

Jane, looking up with drenched eyelashes, nodded.

The doctor began to question her practically, began

to advise her as to diet and exercise. No use to make herself sick! She must get out every day, walk several miles in the fresh air, eat regularly.

"This kind of thing—" he glanced about the darkened room—"will simply kill you, and what good will that do?"

The woman on the bed looked at him sombrely, smiled reluctantly.

"I think I should have killed myself—just waded out and let the waves carry me away," she whispered guiltily, "if it hadn't"—she jerked her head slightly in the direction of Carol's room—"if it hadn't been for the unfairness to the child," she said.

"I've been wondering how you felt about that," the doctor said, shrugging, sighing, his old eyes very kind.

"I couldn't—desert—anyone who depended on me!" Jane whispered, her eyes filling again.

"I didn't know whether you were glad or sorry!" old Graham admitted.

She looked at him, conscious that there was some sort of misunderstanding between them.

"How do you mean?" she asked.

"Well, I didn't know whether, under the circumstances, his child would mean anything to ye," the doctor said, watching her curiously.

"Carol! She loves me more than she does him," Jane assured him, with spirit.

"I wasn't talking of Carol. Look here," said Jim Graham in a dead silence, blinking at her over the tops of the glasses now, "you know that there's going to be another baby, don't ye?"

Her blue eyes widened—widened—in the pale face.

"Whose?" she breathed, clutching his hand.

"Yours. You're going to have a baby. Don't tell me

ye never knew that!" the old man said, touched and pitying and impatient all in one.

"I!" The word rang in the room like a bullet shot, and Jane sat up on the bed panting, her clasped fingers pressed against her mouth. She brought her feet to the floor.

"Certainly, you," Dr. Graham said unhesitatingly.

"But I—but I——" She took down her hands now, to grasp his. "I've been married nearly five years," she gasped. Her voice failed her. "I——" Suddenly she went limp, a scared little girl again. "I never thought of such a thing!" she faltered.

"Well, you'll have to begin to think about it now," said the doctor encouragingly.

She stared at him blankly.

"Doctor—you're *sure?*"

For answer the old man questioned her gently in turn, his fat old hand laid on her own, his gray eyes keen and kindly behind the strong lenses.

"Aren't *you?*" he queried simply.

She was breathing in deep, short gasps, like a frightened bird, her two linked hands pressed over her heart. Now he saw the wonderment grow in her eyes, deepen and shine there like a light from within, turn their blue deeps to sapphire, to ultramarine. Her lips were slightly parted, and as he watched he saw laughter and tears capture her together, and heard both break in her voice.

"Why, I—why, I——" she stammered. "Oh, but it couldn't be that!" she breathed. The glorious colour had rushed over her face; her eyes, looking beyond him, seemed filled with vision. Small, tumbled, forlorn, and solitary in her darkened room only a few minutes before, now she was gloriously and thrillingly alive; she seemed, even to the simple, unimaginative old man, a creature poised breathlessly for flight.

For a few minutes they sat so without speaking, the doctor watching her kindling face with reverence and concern, and Jane, staring into the future transfigured, holding tightly to his friendly hand, as if by that wholesome anchor she held herself to things mundane.

Then she brought her eyes back and searched his face wistfully, fearfully.

"Oh, but not for *me!*" she whispered. Tears—but this time tears of joy—sprang to her eyes.

"All the ladies that I tell that to ain't so well pleased, Jane," said the doctor, fumbling for his handkerchief with his free hand, and frankly blowing his nose.

"But to me—to me!" she said electrically. "Why, even when I was happy," Jane added, unconscious of the pathos in her words that made his throat prick again. "Even when I was happy, I wanted her so—my little girl! I wanted her so! And to think," she stammered, her face running with tears, "that she'll be here, here at Storm House, toddling about, for Carol and for me to love!

"Sarah, you know. Sarah, for my mother," she said proudly. And as the doctor, shaken beyond all memory of emotion on his own part, could only nod at her, and gulp, and smile behind the glasses that were flashing darts and arrows before his wet eyes, she went on, in a voice that sang, "Oh, Doctor, there never was a little girl that meant to her mother what she'll mean to me. My own! Her crib beside my bed, and her blocks, her silver bowl . . ."

And suddenly, still half child herself, she slid to her knees, and rested her elbows on the doctor's knee, and buried her face in her hands, and pressed them against his shoulder.

He heard her hot, tearful murmur, like that of a repentant child, and he felt her breast rise and fall storm-

ily on the last of the lessening sobs. "Oh, my God, I thank Thee!" she stammered.

"Just tell me," she said in a keen whisper, dropping her hands to hold him by the shoulder, bringing her pale, tear-stained face and dishevelled dark hair close to him, "just tell me that I haven't hurt her. By all this crying—this lying indoors—this—this *badness*."

This was his chance.

"No, I don't know's ye have yet," the doctor assured her, monitorially, judicially, "for ye've got some ways to go. I wouldn't expect this young lady of yours until 'round the first of May. But I certainly would try to cheer up, Jane."

"*Try* to cheer up?" she echoed him in her own strong, confident voice, through which the very winds of heaven seemed blowing once more, "I won't have to try, now! No, no!" And Jane laid her face against the wrinkled old one and dropped her voice to the soft, tired tones of the forgiven child. "I'll be good, now!" she said humbly.

CHAPTER XX

AT ABOUT this same hour, in a beautiful drawing room thirty-two hundred miles away, a man and woman sat talking. It was an extremely cold, snowy afternoon, and the apartment's comfort was enhanced not only by the radiators that sometimes clicked and hissed softly in a silence, but by the coal fire that burned in a high-shouldered fireplace.

The room was dark; only one mellow lamp was lighted, the blue coldness of the winter afternoon had been shut away by high dark tapestry curtains; on the walls finer tapestries were hung, and rich bits of old vestments and altar draperies. The tall carved candlesticks that stood by the hearth had begun their grave lives in an old church, too, as had some of the chairs—Italian chairs, their high backs cut deeply with ancient coats-of-arms and cardinals' hats caught in fringed nets.

There was a grand piano dimly shining in the soft gloom of one corner, there were books, bound in vellum and bronze leather, on the long monastery table that cut the room in two. On the piano dark roses bloomed red, and mirrored themselves; a tangle of pink California pepper hung from a pottery jar on the mantel, and on a strange frail old desk of French inlay was a low silver bowl of violets, great single purple blooms on sprawling stems, and fragrant, tight, balled white violets as sturdy as the popcorn they resembled.

Two persons were the sole occupants of the room. The man was in a square, thinly cushioned, tall-backed

chair by the fire, his own fine, long, nervous fingers spread about and gripping the carven griffons' faces that ended its wide wooden arms. He had shrunk backward in the seat, and with his head slightly fallen to one side and his narrowed eyes fixed abstractedly on the fire, he was faintly scowling at some unwelcome or painful thought.

The woman, opposite him in a great chair of wine-red velvet, with the dull gold arabesques and lozenges of a shield behind her head, shone in the soft gloom of the room like a lily, its only point of light.

A woman of white and gold; her gown of heavy white lace, her stockings lacy, and her white slippers buckled with gold. Her skin was white, the transparent and yet vital white of a flower petal, her fine ringed hands, locked on her knee as in speaking she bent eagerly forward, as white as curds, and ringed in gold and dull jewels, blue and green. But all light focussed and was imprisoned in her marvellous hair, the shimmering, sliding, uncurled mass of it drifting about her head like an aureole, its amazing gold so much the brightest and most living thing in the room.

Sitting against the glowing crimson background, slender and young and beautiful, poised lightly, like some brilliant bird from another sphere, Sylvia raised her shining amber eyes to meet those of Jerome Delafield, inviting him to admire her. And Jerome had, for a few seconds, an odd sensation of trying to fit this Sylvia of to-day—the New York Sylvia of the smart luncheon rooms and the Avenue and the opera and theatre—into his old impression of Sylvia Bellamy at Storm House.

He could not do it. They were two separate women. He admired this new Sylvia enormously, with a jealous, anxious, troubled intensity. But he did not love her, or

believe in her, or dream wild, intoxicating dreams of her any more. And perhaps it was as well, he thought. For this Sylvia hungered for admiration, more of it, more of it! She knew nothing of love.

She made him impatient, nowadays, she chilled and surprised him, over and over again. It was astonishing to find that she could send a luncheon salad back and back, and still again back, to the kitchen because it did not please her. It was amazing to know that, genuinely as she professed herself to despise Ken Turner and his millions, still she would not hurt Ken's feelings; she was just a little proud of his admiration and friendship.

"You're not listening to me, Jerdy," she said patiently.

"I beg your pardon. I was thinking."

"About what?"

"About you, as it happened."

"You were thinking," she accused him, "about Jane."

"Truly I wasn't! I was thinking about you. Truly."

"Well, perhaps you were. But that letter to Jane is on your mind," Sylvia stated. "I've noticed it, ever since we mailed it! Wasn't that fun, on New Year's Day!" she added, in a different tone, "walking in the snow, and mailing the letter?"

"You were very cute, that day." Jerome evaded an answer, his unhappy smile upon her.

"No, but you're glad we sent that letter?" she persisted.

"Well, perhaps I will be glad, when she's had it a day or two and answers it," he amended.

"You're ridiculous about it!" Sylvia said briefly, displeased. "And you did love me New Year's Day," she added, with a sudden change of mood and an accusative little oblique smile.

"You were very cute," he said again, lifelessly.

There was a tea table near her; a little maid was coming and going noiselessly, as they talked, carrying away the teacups and the sandwiches, the silver tea kettle and the trays, straightening chairs, removing all the evidences that there had been a score of persons here for tea. Sylvia stretched a white hand for a cigarette, lighted it, and sat puffing it, staring into the fire.

"We can't back out now," she said. And then, with a little vicious tightening of her mouth and another sidewise glance, she added, "Although I believe you would like to!"

"That's just—sheer—naughtiness," Jerome commented wearily, lacing his big fingers, sighing, looking absently ahead.

"No, it's not. If you're so crazy about Jane," Sylvia said lightly, "if you're thinking about her, worrying about her all the time, it's not extremely complimentary to me! I—I've given up almost every friend I ever had for you, and it seems to me . . ."

He listened a long time to the silvery, even voice, sweet and plaintive and reproachful.

"If you are thinking of Jane all the time, why don't you go back to her?" she asked tentatively.

"I can't go back!" Jerome said steadily, wretchedly.

Her amber eyes glinted; her expression changed, mouth tightening, colour rising.

"Oh! You'd like to?" she asked, softly, dangerously.

"No, don't take that tone, Silver," he said, unimpressed. "You don't think that. You know that what—what I feel for you is different from what I could ever feel for anyone else. You know I had never—loved, before! And what it has meant to me!

"But there are stronger things in life than love," he said simply, and was silent.

She watched him with curious, bright, hostile eyes for a few minutes.

"And I suppose living with a person you don't love, and being afraid to take what you want—that's stronger?" she asked, with a faint little trembling suggestion of a sneer in her voice.

Jerome did not answer. He was staring into the fire, his big hands locked together and fallen between his knees. Now he ground his palms together.

"God!" she heard him say, under his breath. And again, as if he were thinking aloud, "God!"

Sylvia was a little uneasy. Her expression changed, softened, and as she dropped her head on one side, studying him, a pitying look came into her eyes.

"It couldn't have been a sweeter, kinder letter," she began timidly. The man's brow was dark, his lip bitten; he made no answer.

"How we deceive ourselves!" he presently said in a dry, bitter tone, looking up.

For a second Sylvia looked faintly surprised, faintly affronted. Then a sorrowful, gentle look came into her face, and she, too, looked into the fire.

"I suppose so," she said, with regret and compunction. "I suppose that it is only because we love each other so much, Jerry, only because we want so terribly to be happy, that we fool ourselves into thinking that Jane will be glad to give you up, that she would not be content to hold you, knowing that you loved another woman!"

The man was silent for a space.

"At least I can't hypnotize myself into thinking she'll like it!" he said.

"No, she won't like it," Sylvia conceded quickly.

"But," she added, almost timidly, after a silence, "it's no harder on her than the fact, Jerdy."

"She might never have known the fact!" Jerry said darkly.

"And you and I never have loved each other?" Sylvia completed it, round-eyed.

"No, no, of course not! Of course not!" he conceded hastily. "What I am trying to do," he went on after a while, "is love you and be fair to her, too, and I suppose that what I despise about myself is that it can't be done. It will cut her to the soul—that letter. She may get over it, as you say, and I hope she will. But it reaches her to-day. It's about three o'clock in Los Antonios, and she had it in this morning's mail, or will have it in this afternoon's. I can't bear the thought of it!

"It'll be all right—it'll be all right—this time next week," he presently added feverishly. "I keep telling myself that, I keep thinking of that! She'll face it, and we'll get everything adjusted somehow. Things do work out. But she's innocent in the whole matter, and I hate to stab her!"

"She's as innocent as I am," Sylvia agreed with him. "And you are, too. It's just—Fate, Jerdy. I know that sounds cheap and theatrical. But it's true. We couldn't help it. She can't help it."

Jerome did not speak, and presently the woman went on, gently and persuasively:

"My dear, don't think I don't know how hard it is! But the point is this: Doesn't it save suffering, in the long run? For you and me of course it will; we can see that, even now. But for her? Won't it save her infinite suffering, when the first shock is over? Why, Jerdy, Jerdy, you know it will! If it didn't, I would no more consent to it than you would! Does any woman, and least of all Jane, want to live with a man after *love* is over? That's no marriage. And she's proud, for all

she's a blunt, childish little thing. She'd be the last to endure a situation like that!"

"But," he protested unhappily, wringing his long nervous interlaced fingers together, "I do love her. That's part of it."

"Of course you do. And I do, too," Sylvia said promptly. "But you know what I mean, Jerdy. I mean —the real thing."

"I keep wondering what she'll do," Jerome presently offered, having conceded to this only a faint narrowing of the eyes, a faint tightening of the jaw.

"I know what I wish she'd do, and I know what I'm afraid she'll do!" Sylvia said in her wistful, haunting voice. "I'm afraid," she elucidated, as Jerome looked up interrogatively, "I'm afraid that she'll go right on there at Storm House, feeling martyred and lonely and abused, and that consequently she'll not get over it, not get new interests into her life. And what I'd love to have her do," she went on, "is go back to those old people of hers, who think so much of her, and send me my adorable little Carol! For after all, my sweetheart," Sylvia finished, coming white and fragrant and golden to the wide arm of his chair, and perching there, with his big arm around her, "after all, I'm as close to Carol as Jane is. And I think," Sylvia said winningly, with a little blink to keep back tears, and a little twitch at her mouth that was more like a smile, "I think that in time she might come to love me, just a little?"

She ended on an interrogative note, and Jerome laughed briefly, in a troubled fashion.

"I'm going to take half of what Elsie left," he said, "and make Jane independent for life. It will mean a comfortable four or five hundred every month—more than enough for her to do whatever she wants, travel, or keep an attractive place in San Francisco—anything.

The other half is Carol's, which of course means mine, until she comes of age. I don't want any of it!"

"And *I* don't want any of it," Sylvia echoed dreamily, her body resting against him, half supported by his arm. "I've got enough, and—" Her tone brightened, and she turned from her contemplation of the fire to put a little kiss on his temple—"and I have my genius to write best-sellers for me!" she said.

"Oh, Silver," he muttered, on a sort of groan, resting his tired head against her, "I feel myself such a failure —such a rotter! One reads divorce statistics quietly enough—one to every four marriages, one to every three marriages—whatever it is. But somehow, to bring it home to one's self——"

"I know," she interposed eagerly, as he stopped speaking. "I know exactly what you mean! Isn't that just what I was going through, when I came to Los Antonios last year? Why, I didn't love Garth Bellamy, hadn't loved him for years and years. But the shock, the sickness, of contemplating actual divorce—it's with me yet. It was like a physical thing, a scourge, a weight."

"I never thought of what that meant to you," he said, struck.

"It was frightful!" Sylvia exclaimed, with suddenly wet eyelashes. "Ah, my dear," she went on in a low, coaxing tone, her soft cheek against his, "the only thing for us to do is to forget that part. We can't help, we're not responsible, and it makes it easier for her, and for us, to go our separate ways."

"I suppose so," Jerome said, unconvinced.

They sat still for a few minutes, neither moving. The little maid had carried away the last of the tea things now and straightened the chairs; the fire had fallen to glowing pink ash. Outside, the first of the snow was tickling at the windows and furring their frames.

"Opera to-night," said Sylvia. "Do you want to go?"

"What is it?" he asked.

"Alas, it's *Meistersinger*."

"Oh, gosh, that's heavy," Jerome commented, wincing. He gave a deep sigh, settled back a little into his chair. "Honestly, I can't, Silver," he said. "The heat of that Opera House, and the crowd, and being far up there in the box, perched in tippy seats in the dark—it scares me. It—brings it all back!"

"Now, now, now, you weren't going to mention that bad thing!" the woman chided him.

"I can't help it!" he protested. His eyes were really uneasy.

"But, darling, think of the nights and nights and nights that thousands of people crowd in there, and there's never an accident."

"I know. But I'm not afraid of accidents. Things are bad enough," he said fervently, "just as they are!"

"Come now, Jerdy, that's naughty. You lose so much happiness, dear, turning perfectly white if you see a subway crowd, and sitting on the very edge of the taxi seat, and yesterday—going up in that elevator and walking down nine floors!"

"It was awful!" he insisted as she stopped, half perturbed and half laughing. "This one in your house here is bad enough, but that one! It seemed to leap up like a bird. I—I assure you that I was helpless. I *couldn't* get into it again."

"And suppose it had been in the Woolworth—sixty floors—isn't it?—at one swoop!"

"Oh, don't!" he said, shutting his eyes as if he experienced an actual vertigo.

"Jerdy, wouldn't it be better just to make yourself do all these things—force yourself a little? Why, my

dear, what would you do if you had to cross the ocean again?"

"I suppose I couldn't. My heart would stop."

"But think what you lose!"

"I know. I'm sorry. Just at first, when I came here," Jerome said, "it all seemed better. Do you remember?"

"You were wonderful!" Sylvia assured him admiringly.

"But lately, when we couldn't get seats far back in the theatre, for instance, night before last, whenever there's a jam, as there was at Edna's tea—people all buzzing and the air smelling of flowers and clothes—— It simply sickens me; I'm in a panic. I'm something just finding out it's in a trap!" he pleaded.

"But darling, how silly!" Sylvia persisted. "We were only about ten rows from the back. We couldn't see anything or hear anything. You see," she diverged earnestly, reproachfully, "that'll grow on you, Jerdy, until you don't want to see anything or anybody at all. And it's so ridiculous, dear!"

"I didn't mind the football," he said suddenly.

"Well, of course not—right out in the open air! But you minded most horribly getting there."

"Yes, that was awful. I'm just that way, dear," Jerome added, after a pause. "It's the way I wear my scar. Every one——" Suddenly he looked older, and worried. He passed his hand restively over his forehead—"Every one of them wears a scar somewhere!" he said in a harsh, strange voice; "and I wear mine there, in my soul, where I'm afraid."

"Now that's nonsense!" Sylvia said lightly, kissing him.

"It's true, Silver-heels."

"But, darling, everybody wants you, everybody wants

to meet you, and you are trying to escape from it all, all the time. It's not fair to yourself, and it isn't fair to them."

"I know," he muttered regretfully. "I keep thinking of the South Sea Islands," he confessed, "or of Vermont—ten feet deep in good, clean, cool snow. My God," Jerome went on, in sudden violence, "there's so much suffering in the world, Silver! These mobs of people, jamming into those stinking underground trains, stepping on gum and wet newspapers, thinking of money—money—money—how much they've got in their poor wet pocketbooks, how much they owe, how much they have to pay for shoes!"

"Jerdy," her silvery voice said steadily, reproachfully.

"I know!" he said, shrinking back again, and was silent.

"My dearest, that's all so exaggerated, so abnormal. Here you are not yet forty years old, strong and well, with plenty of money, and with fame, and with a woman to adore you, and you let this horrid thing ride you like a black devil!"

"I know!" he said again quickly, sensitively.

"Well, but you mustn't do it, Jerdy. Yesterday, at luncheon at the Biltmore," Sylvia pursued, scolding him, "you liked that, didn't you? I mean when we saw the Knorps, and Judy, and Alec Younger, and met that attractive Russian—the new violinist. Wasn't that all right?"

"Kind of," he conceded reluctantly. "But it was rather hot and buzzy," he submitted timidly.

Sylvia laughed despairingly.

"And to-morrow night," she began again presently. "You must simply steel yourself, for that's going to be rare. Everyone's going to be there—an opening, you

know——" She broke off, arrested by his appalled expression. "Oh, now, Jerdy," she protested, "you're going to *that!*"

"Oh, dearest, if you only knew how it scares me! What do I care if it's an opening? I saw *Giroflé-Girofla* when I was a kid, in Boston, and didn't like it much. Why should I jam in among all those jabbering people?"

"Jerdy," the woman said patiently, after watching him for a minute with her head tipped on one side, like a bird. "What are you really afraid of—fire?" Her eyes fell upon the tiny decoration he wore in his buttonhole, and again she laughed ruefully. "Shame on you!" she said, with her white finger touching it. "You, who have crosses and palms and things! What if the place *did* burn down? We'd be together, anyway."

"It's no specific fear," he began slowly. He stopped, and ran his hand over his forehead again fretfully. "It's a sort of cosmic horror," he muttered, thinking aloud. "I'm sort of shaken up to-night, anyway," he pleaded. "That damnable letter reached Los Antonios to-day, and poor little Jane's alone with it to-night!"

Sylvia returned to her chair.

"Do you know," she said, "that I'm afraid some day soon I am going to scold you?"

"I'm sorry," he answered. But there was a tiny edge of steel in his voice that had never been there before.

"I am really!" Sylvia went on. "Because—here I am, among my friends, the most interesting, the most alive group in the whole city. And I've been waiting—it seems to me that I've been waiting all my life—for just this. To be free of Garth, and to have you here! And now, you are shrivelling away from these people, who are trying so hard to be nice to you, who have welcomed you in a—a perfectly astonishing way.

"Now, I'll tell you, sweetheart," she said animatedly, when the long and even a trifle heated admonishment was over, "suppose we do this? We'll slip off to-night for supper, to that ridiculous French place you like—about as gay as Campbell's!—and we'll let the old opera slide. I'm tired anyway. And to-morrow night we'll dine here, very quietly, and we'll ask Ken Turner, and he can take me to the opening. How's that?"

Jerome hesitated only the imperceptible part of a second.

"That'll be fine," he said then, mildly.

For he understood her now, he told himself, walking home through the snowy park a few hours later. To protest that he found that arrangement preposterous would only have been to anger her. She was, surprisingly, an easily ruffled, jealous, swiftly angered creature, superb and unreasonable as a panther in her rages.

He told himself, he forced himself to think, that he loved her not one whit the less for being so entirely different from the idea he had had of her in those old stolen, rapturous meetings at Storm House and in the few exquisite hours they had had together in San Francisco. She had seemed a goddess then, golden-headed, silver-toned, radiant, and remote, not heir to all the commonplaces of the flesh.

Now she was just—Sylvia; an extremely beautiful woman, cold and selfish and incomprehensible in some moods, melting and merry and sweet in others, always calculating, and always entirely self-centred. He, himself, the man who loved her, who had sacrificed home and honour for her, was merely existent, in those beautiful amber eyes, insomuch as she needed him, or chanced, at the moment, to care for him.

No bitter need of his own, no desperate appeal for her company and her sympathy was sufficient, he had

learned now, to persuade her to break one engagement at her beauty parlour, or drop from her day's programme one casual tea hour even with the least significant of her friends.

She was a law unto herself, Sylvia; she made her own plans, did exactly as she pleased, and demanded of Jerome that he fit his schedule entirely to hers. There could be no compromise with her.

Amazingly, astoundingly, she had made this clear to him during the first days of his visit to New York. Quite without explanation or apology, she had demonstrated to him that her will was his law.

"I didn't like the way you talked to that tall girl at George's," she had said to him frankly. "You were very horrid, this afternoon. You didn't say anything about my new hat—my hair—my ring. You didn't tell me that you thought I talked rather smartly at Alfred's. You've talked about everyone else who was there, Jerdy. Now perhaps you'll talk about me. Didn't I look pretty? Didn't you think they rather listened to me?"

Dazed, trying to laugh amusedly at her absurdities, he had attempted, in the beginning, to win her to a maturer, more reasonable, attitude. But all effort of that sort was thrown away on Sylvia. The world had long found her irresistible as she was; Jerome Delafield, clumsy and nervous and gentle, was not going to change her.

Before he learned that truth, she stunned and dazed and deafened him with controversy and argument and eager defence. Never loud, never noisy nor vulgar, yet there was a quality about that quick, angry, self-defensive voice that frightened him.

"You told Fanny that we couldn't come to dinner because I had made an engagement for Friday," she

would reproach him, stammering in her vexation under the smarting sense of being misunderstood, "and I —I—I only made that date because I thought you wanted to meet Moran. You *said* you did. And so I think you are very ungrateful—I think it's absolutely unjust—for you to—for you to blame *me*—and put it on *me*—because I never, of my own accord—I never could have——"

"But, Silver, dearest, what does it matter who made the date!" he would protest, laughing, in those early days. "The fact is, we *are* dated with Moran, and we're perfectly glad to go, and what of it?"

"Yes, I know, but—but," the stammering, eager voice would take it up tirelessly, "you told Fanny *I* did it! And I *didn't* do it. Or, if I did, it was only because you—you—you——"

"You did it for me, and it was a sacrifice, and you were a little angel," he learned to say pacifically. And sometimes, at this change in tone, she would kiss him, and be mollified and loving again.

But not always. For it took very little to upset her and she was too entirely undisciplined ever to conceal her mood, or to vent her anger upon its real causes. Jerome, as the nearest available safety valve for her wrath, learned to watch her anxiously when they were out in public together. Was she having a good time? Was everything all right?

Upon certain occasions, luncheons, dinners, theatre parties, she was popular and beautiful and happy, and then her merriment and affection poured themselves out upon Jerome, and he felt that even when they were alone together afterward she was still under the influence of the crowd, acting, dramatizing what he said to her and what she said to him.

At other times some slight, or fancied slight, or the

contemplation of some woman she fancied more fortunate than herself, drove her to absolute furies of discontent. She would be irritable and unreasonable for days at a time, "hating" her horrid hair, "hating" the silly way she herself looked and spoke, "hating" that silly, stupid other woman about whom everybody was making such a sickening fuss!

He had been in New York three months this night, and already it seemed to him that he had completely forgotten his old idea of Sylvia. What had he thought she was, the actual woman, the personality, at Storm House and in San Francisco?

Long, long before this he had thought of escape. But escape was not easy. Even though she had disillusioned him so greatly, she remained—something. He loved her, anyway. They—they certainly loved each other. That was a static fact, of course. Everything he had done had been built on that. Sylvia felt the nervous pressure of this accursed city, as everyone did; she showed the strain of bad hours, hot rooms, rich food, rushing and competing and comparing. It was an absolutely unnatural atmosphere. But she was, under it all, or rather she could be, when she pleased, as sweet and fine and lovely as he had ever dreamed! Those occasional glimpses of the old Sylvia made everything else unimportant. Anyway, from week to week he stayed, satisfying himself with the very fallen crumbs of love.

Perhaps, he reflected to-night, walking rapidly down under the leafless trees between the banked, soiled walls of last week's snow, with the cold city lights twinkling in masses and lines, toward the south, where the city lay—perhaps it was that he was always trying to look through this pathetic, moody, unreasonable woman, so often a prey to jealousy, egotism, and her own senses, to find again the enchantress of last autumn,

the woman who had seemed a miracle to him under the high, dark, clothy leaves of a fig tree, beside the western ocean.

The city seemed bound tight and hard to-night, shrivelled and shut in under the merciless dome of the piercing cold. January fourth. And perhaps the contrary, wilful Western winter had softened, perhaps there were warm breezes at Storm House, and a peaceful sea, and poppies on the new grass of the cliffs looking pale under the year's first moon. Perhaps Jane and Carol would rush out in their white sweaters, bareheaded, to-morrow morning, shouting among the jumping airedales at the first real rush of spring. Last year the alfalfa had been two inches high on New Year's Day.

Alfalfa! What a delicious sound the word had, here in Central Park, with a diamond-cold midnight twinkling and snapping in a hundred icy, frosty, tight-bound voices about him.

But Jane wouldn't be shouting and jumping to-morrow, he remembered. That murderous letter of his, asking for freedom, would strike deep into her loving, trusting little heart to-morrow, if it had not struck to-day.

And the thought came to him, as if it had been spoken into his ear, in words: "You who hate pain! How much suffering and fear have you put into the world to-night?

"You, who think you would end all sorrow if you could? Wasn't it in your power to spare her this—your wife?"

The old arguments fell away, were blown aside on the moving night air. Even in his own thoughts he could reconstruct them no longer. He could no longer say, "But Sylvia's happiness—my happiness—aren't they important, too?"

Sylvia's happiness! Why, he knew now how little that depended upon anyone but Sylvia herself. And he knew how impossible it was that she should ever find

even a trace of real happiness, upon her beautiful, spoiled, selfish, and confident way through life! The refusal of her shiny mass of brilliant hair to lie in the way she fancied, a tiny flaw in her creamy complexion, the non-arrival of her fur coat from the remodeller's, or her new hat from the milliner's, was enough to put Sylvia out of sympathy with all the world for a whole evening. And in this mood she might hear that Jerome Delafield had fallen dead in the street, without more than a whimpering comment that it was too horrible, and an instant resumption of her indignation against that wretched woman who had sworn the coat should be delivered before six o'clock, or her grim determination to have discharged the man who had promised her the hat.

As for himself—Jerome laughed suddenly aloud, and a young man who was rushing a young woman home over the snow, his hand jammed under her fur-clad elbow, turned to look at him sharply in surprise. Jerome heard him, and the girl too, laugh in their turn as they flew upon their way.

As for himself! why, never before in his life had he known what misery was. No, not even in the frozen, cruel trenches, when his whole world had been peopled with the pallid, dying, patient faces of the hopeless men who lived in them; who muttered sometimes, chafing their sore and poisoned hands together; who looked up sometimes when the shadow of an airplane, or a random shell, went past; who whispered of life, and of the world; who were the living dead, and had almost forgotten it.

Then he had at least been, like themselves, the victim of the most colossal error history would ever show. He had suffered, but as the oppressed, not as the oppressor. He had dreamed, then, of somehow arising from his

charnel house—this incredible dream of hopelessness and horror—to help other men.

And he had come back to life to find Jane, small and sturdy, blue-eyed and red-cheeked, happy and loving, beside him, and had tortured her.

He laughed again, grew suddenly, fearfully, sober.

"Maybe I am losing my mind," he said conversationally, aloud.

CHAPTER XXI

THE next day, at luncheon, out of a mood of painful abstraction, he said, suddenly and irresolutely:

"Sylvia, there's an excellent chance that letter hasn't been delivered yet. The paper this morning said that all the westbound mails had been held in Chicago."

"My goodness!" Sylvia exclaimed, violently impatiently. "Why will you harp upon that letter, Jerry! *Forget* it."

She was looking her loveliest to-day, and in the snapping cold sunshine that had flooded the Avenue, as they walked downtown, Jerry had been conscious of her extraordinary beauty, and knew that the world had been conscious of it, too. Her photograph, enlarged almost to life size, had pleased Sylvia, when they discovered it by chance in a dim, glassed doorway; the little stir in the restaurant had pleased her, too, when she sank into her padded wall seat, nodding and smiling at friends here and there in the well-filled room.

At the sudden scathing tone Jerome shrivelled, and Sylvia sulkily repaired the harm the walk had done her face, retouching eyelashes and lips and cheeks with powder and rouge.

"I'm sorry," she said unrepentantly, when this was done, "but it's too awful, this continual worrying about Jane and that letter!" And leaning across the table confidentially, she added, "Jerdy, I've got to tell you this. She's known about you and me ever since I was in San Francisco. I told her before I came away. And the

one thing she said was that she wanted you to be happy."

The shock of it rendered him speechless for a few minutes while he stared at her, and Sylvia put away her jangling chains and beauty boxes, put her soft velvet bag on an empty chair, and finally brought her eyes to his defiantly.

"You told her!" Jerome whispered.

"Certainly. So that all of your anxiety for her has been quite thrown away. She's known all along."

"*You wrote her?*"

"No. Don't stare so, Jerdy; people will notice. No, I told her in the hotel, the last afternoon we were there."

"Sylvia, how could you!"

"Please don't make us conspicuous, Jerdy—*please*, dear. It's so silly," Sylvia said, nodding and waving a white hand at a couple who had just come in.

"I see," Jerome said lifelessly, after a pause. And for the rest of the meal he was entirely adequate to her demands, kindly and conversational, and in the nice literary mood she loved when the English poet and his pale, chilly, intelligent blonde wife joined them.

But that day marked the last moment of happiness in New York for Jerome. A sort of madness of realization had come upon him, and his whole being was obsessed with the terrible thought of Jane, alone and abandoned, mothering his daughter, living her broken life at Storm House, thirty-two hundred miles away.

Once he found himself in a telegraph office, scribbling her a few anguished words: "May I come back, Jenny?"

But he tore it up, contemptuous of his own selfishness, fatuity. Of course he might not go back. There was no return for him.

She had known all the time! She had known all the

time! And somehow she had written him quiet, natural letters, about Carol and expenses, whitewashing the barns, buttressing the terrace. Not often, not—he could see now!—happily. The notes had been brief, decorous documents enough, quite unlike Jane. But he had never been away from her before, he had never known —there had not even been a courtship to show him —what sort of a correspondent his wife was.

Jerome walked the winter streets, and about him shrieked the furies that were his own terrible thoughts. There was a place in the world, a grassy plateau shaded by eucalyptus and fig trees, bounded by a whitewashed fence with a gate in it, and by a stretch of warm sand, and the blue sea, a place of peace. And he had driven himself away from it.

There was no word from Jane now; she had had his letter, and she was dumb. Silence. Silence. She did not write again. Was she moving, in the matter of the divorce? He did not know.

One wild March day, when the elements seemed to have gone mad, and the whole city was crouched flat under a frenzied gale of sleet and snow and frantically driven mist, Jerome fought his way along an obscure waterfront, between sealed warehouses on one hand, whose doors opened only occasionally, to deliver a staggering, puerile human form to the roaring, voracious storm, and the fretting line of the ships on the other; ships just home, feathered from bow to stern in frozen, milk-white spray, and ships ready to leave, penned by the crusted bleak surface of the harbour.

Tugs, fussily dutiful even in the blizzard, churned the ice-blocks into panic; the sooty bergs piled upon each other, changed shape, sunk under icy waters, emerged frozen to new forms again. Under the piers they were

packed solid; far out in the river there was a troubled centre channel where the rough gray waters ran free.

Jerome, blown against a sheltering bit of dockhouse wall, stayed there, shaking with cold, smothered and driven by the blasting airs. Snow was wet on his face, his heavy gloves felt cold and wet as he raised his hand to brush it away. The world was full of danger to-day, full of mad shoutings and whistlings, crash of harbour ice, rasping of strained ropes and buffers, and the delirious high screaming of the frenzied gales overhead.

That the particular little vessel near him could possibly set forth in this uproar Jerome could not believe. The barometer had already warned the entire Eastern coast of bad weather; it was an ugly time of the year for a North Atlantic passage, at best. The captain, a mild, blue-eyed Norwegian boy, looked to Jerome as if he might be mentally deficient.

"You're not going to start to-day!" he shouted.

"What say?" the young navigator called back.

Jerome, with gesture and words, repeated the question.

"Oh, sure—go four o'clock!" the man answered indifferently, staggering away.

Jerome followed him, and they talked.

Afterward, he went uptown to say good-bye to Sylvia. Soft and warm and white and golden, she was like some luxurious little animal curled beside her fire. Deep in her pillows, she listened to him, her French novel dropping from her hand.

"But—but what are you sailing on, Jerdy? Doesn't the *Olympic* sail to-day? Is it the *Berengaria?*"

"It's no ship you ever heard of."

"French?"

"Norwegian."

"But what's her name, Jerdy?"

"It doesn't matter. She's—not a passenger ship. I'm the only passenger."

Sylvia straightened up, delicate dark brows drawn together.

"What are you talking about! Why," she said, in a silence, fixing beautiful amber eyes on him, "you're—you're terrified of the sea, Jerdy. You've always said that you wouldn't sail on the biggest liner afloat, and now here you are—starting off on a day like this! Are you trying to commit suicide?"

"Perhaps," he admitted, with a brief laugh.

She pondered this, hurt and dissatisfied.

"You've been acting so queerly," she complained, her eyes trying to read him. "I suppose you'll blame this on me!"

He felt an infinite boredom, an aloofness. He would not waste time on one more scene. Why should he try to distress her, snug and soft and perfumed on this deep velvety couch before her fire? It was quite beyond his power in any case.

"No," he said grimly, "I don't blame you."

"Because, truly—truly, Jerdy," Sylvia said eagerly, "it has been you, yourself, who made it so hard. Oh, you have, Jerdy! Not a flower, all this week, no telephone calls——"

"You haven't missed the flowers," he observed, with an unsmiling glance about.

"Ken Turner," she explained with a shrug. And then, leaning forward to lay appealing white fingers on his arm, "Ah, Jerdy, dear, it mustn't all end like this!" she pleaded. "Just stay here—and be good—and don't take things so hard!"

He was sitting with his locked hands dropped be-

tween his knees. Now he glanced down at the fingers on his arm, dispassionately, even amusedly, and Sylvia withdrew them.

"You love me," she said, widening her shining hazel eyes winningly.

He did not answer. But the temperate, thoughtful look he gave her and the patient, quiet manner in which he moved his eyes away were more eloquent than any answer. Sylvia's colour rose, and she bit her lip.

The man got to his feet.

"Good-bye, my dear," he said.

She looked up at him, smiling a challenge.

"Go, my dear. Perhaps it's just what you need," she said. "Perhaps getting rid of the big fear will help the little ones. But come back to me!"

"No, I'll never come back," he said.

"Why, what have I done?" she demanded innocently.

"Nothing," Jerry said briefly, scowling.

"I must have done something to lose you, Jerdy?" she persisted, half playful, half malicious, all amused.

"You never," he said distinctly, "*had* me."

He heard her scornful little laugh, saw her settle herself in her cushions.

"Don't do anything so mad as starting anywhere, to-day," she said, unalarmed. "And come back—kinder, Jerdy."

"Good-bye," he said again, from the hall doorway now. He put on his big coat, jammed down his hat, plunged his hands into his heavy gloves. The little maid let him out, into the elevator hall. He imagined, just as the doors of the cage slammed and the car shot downward, that he heard Sylvia call him.

No matter. The street was gray, the storm had brought an actual twilight at two o'clock; the wind and snow whirled about the big building like a wind-

ing sheet. All down the square, and around the corner, before the dimmed and empty and lamplighted shops of Broadway, men with shovels were scraping sidewalks clean of the fast-piling, powdery whiteness; almost no other humans were abroad.

On the *Drika Klingsberg* Jerome wrote a note to his wife, and a shuddering, tippeted boy took it in a wet mitten and ran off with it through the blinding curtains of the snow. The city clocks were striking four when the *Drika* stirred in her ice-crust and was towed backward through jumbling and piling bergs. There was no city, there was only a wall of gray and grayer shadows, where the city should be. There was no river, only a band of dipping and sluggishly floating ice cakes moving on a ruffle of cold gray. The *Drika* wheezed hoarsely, churned the choked roadway with the convulsive kicking of her own screw, and turned her nose toward cold and distant Norway. Two sailors passed Jerome on the deck, carrying his bag, speaking to each other in a language of which he could not recognize one word.

His square twilighted bedroom contained a pallid flat bed, boarded to the wall, two limp small towels, two narrow ledges for seats, hooks, knobs, locks, stanchions, mysterious messages painted in black on white walls in a Norse tongue, a locker, a washstand with a pitcher, and a slab of mottled soap.

The sea stirred under him; water slapped the vessel's staunch little side, and even in the harbour she keeled. The snow fell—fell—powdering in leprous blotches the outside of the muddy eye of his port. Men were shouting to one another as they washed and holystoned the filthy deck, still littered from the lading. Hatches were still being battened, with ropes and cleats; the radio, in the tiny room next his own, zipped

and stung the unquiet airs that raced and tumbled about them.

Jerome went on deck, staggering as he stepped above the high door sill. It was cold, wild, blinding outside. The snow melted as it fell into the sea, showed dazzling white against the dirty surface of the gray ice blocks.

He leaned on the rail, feeling the rock and jam of the water beneath them as the *Drika* settled into her stride. Already, at half-past four, her lights, like trembling antennæ, were feeling their way ahead of her; her horn droned constantly, just overhead, and shook the deck slightly as it droned.

"I wish I were more afraid of this, Jenny," Jerome said aloud in the roar and rush as he clung to the rail and watched the ice floes part noiselessly ahead of the vessel. "I am not afraid at all, my dear.

"There are feelings stronger than fear, Jenny.

"Shame. Shame. And bitter regret!"

"Better get in out of dis!" shouted Captain Ahrendsen, rocking by him. His face was plastered with fresh snow, and his tarpaulin frosted white. Spray dripped from his blond hair.

Jerome flung him a glance over his shoulder, turned back to the mad play of sea and icebergs and snow and wind. He hung, like a caged bird, to the rail, rising and falling with the harbour rip of the waters.

He had heard nothing. His thoughts were in a world scented with eucalyptus and tarweed and ripening apples. A world hedged in by the homely walls of an old house, and a long whitewashed fence on green, green grass, and the level high barrier of the Pacific's far and soft and blue and hazy horizon. Sunlight dappled through grapevines and fig leaves, he heard the peeping of gulls and the creak of an old windmill.

And finally a boyish voice, with a laugh in it, with infinite simple friendliness and companionship and love in it. A voice calling "Jerry!"

He leaned his head against the rope to which his heavy glove was almost frozen. Cold tears ran down his cheeks, and the wind fixed them there.

"Jenny, my darling!" he whispered. "This—this was what I was really afraid of all along. This was all I had to fear! That I would find you, somehow find you, and that you would love me, and that I would fling it all away! It wasn't crowds, nor poverty, nor noises in the city that I feared. It was just—it was just this, Jenny."

CHAPTER XXII

WHEN he had had his bath, and the flurry of towels, and powder, and splashing clear water, was over in the bathroom, he went down upon the very centre of his mother's big bed.

His clean romper—white banded with blue, or blue banded with white, with a round collar to set off his round little soft throat—was always reserved at this time. It remained on his little padded hanger, and his shiny little shoes, always so fascinating to him, and still unfamiliar with journeying, except for the safe nursery and the porch and the terrace and a small fragment of the shore, stood beneath it. Denied these, which were all his outer clothing, he wore even on a winter day only a small transparent shirt, drawn snugly over his sturdy little form to meet the firm pinnings and foldings of a white nether garment and a pair of white socks. Powdered, warm, amused by the crackling of the fire and the soft disk of pink light that the lamp threw upon the ceiling, he lay contentedly rolling and staring upon his flat pillow on a certain dark March morning when the rains and the wet soft winds that blew about Storm House were ushering in his eleventh exciting month of life.

He was anchored lightly by the firm fingers of his young sister, who sat there with her back propped against the foot of the bed watching him. His mother had of course descended to the kitchen, as was her duty, to get him his eleven-o'clock bottle.

Storm House was creaking and trembling in the gale. Now and then high bare pear branches, or the beaten and shivering whips of the eucalyptus, would strike the window, and the baby's innocent eyes would move in that direction.

"That's a storm, Davy!" Carol would say, with kindly big-sisterly-encouragement, then. "That's a bad, wild rainstorm!"

But David Delafield only gurgled at her in reply. He was too healthy, too safe, too warm, sleepy, hungry, and comfortable, to concern himself with the weather. He looked at the thousand mysterious charms that only he could see in his mother's rooms: the fascinating water stain on the wall near the window, the firelight flickering on the glass of a framed picture, the shadow that was now still, but that would move menacingly across the ceiling when the door opened. He looked at Carol's blue beads, and found them beautiful.

Steps outside the door, and then everything he knew of goodness and kindness and safety was framed in it. A small woman—but he did not know that—a woman with a soft dark mop of hair framing her youthful face, a small, straight figure enveloped in a big ticking apron, and small sturdy hands firmly grasping the warm clean bottle of milk. He knew nothing of the details, he only knew that this was his friend, and he welcomed her with a shout.

"Here, here, here, you wild boy, you!" Jane said, jerking him into place by a fat bare leg, straightening his little pillow, and putting the warm glass between his clutching hands.

As he fell upon his meal, with sputterings of rapture, she drew a light homespun cover over him, and Carol, at a nod, crossed the room and put out the light. Gray, dusky twilight instantly pervaded the place, except

when the fire found some new bit of wood upon which to feed; outside the high, old-fashioned windows the rain sluiced steadily down, beating a tattoo upon the tin roof of the porch, dripping and chattering in the gutters. The wind, twisting any stray board or rope or near-by branch, kept up a constant creaking and battering and whining.

"Maybe he'll sleep in all this!" Jane mused dubiously.

The baby glanced at her obliquely, blandly, without ceasing his attack upon his food, and as an amiable recognition of her attention, put one sturdy small leg upright in air.

"Put the screen around the fire, Carol," Jane directed, herself pushing a chair against the bed. "Now, you go to sleep, you boy," she commanded the baby, putting down the little leg, covering it again.

He had taken the red rubber nipple from his mouth, only to seize it again with a shout. His sister put a battered white Canton flannel rabbit near him, and he stretched a small hand for it, drew it to him, and stared at his mother, around the bottle top, with his blue eyes expiring, inundated, drowned with sleep. The watchers noiselessly withdrew.

"I kind of like a rainy Saturday!" Carol said enthusiastically in the dim, cool, draughty hall.

"Well, I do, too!" Jane concurred. "There's something deliciously cosy about it. To smell Hong's molasses cookies, and hear the rain, and keep the fires up——"

"Are you going to paste your book up, Jane?"

"My pictures? I believe I'll do that very thing," Jane said, turning into the old sitting room. "You see we've got all of Davy to paste," she reminded her stepdaughter. "Except those very tiny ones, while Miss

Rachett was still here, I haven't kept up with him at all."

"He keeps us too busy to have any time for his pictures!" Carol exulted, in rich maternal pride.

"Well, that's just exactly what he does, the muggins! And I think this is about the third time in his life that he's had to have his nap indoors," Jane said, investigating closets, taking paste and scissors from the old desk that had so long been Jerry's, "so that pasting has been out of the question!"

She and Carol switched on the lamps, put fresh wood on the fire. Carol tiptoed upstairs for a peep at the sleeping Davy, and to find her own little photograph book.

"And bring down your French book. We may just as well get Monday's lessons off our souls!" Jane ran to the foot of the stairs to whisper after her.

"Jane, don't you think this is a sweet room?" Carol questioned appreciatively, returning.

"This room? I love it." Jane looked about it affectionately. "There isn't an inch of Storm House that I don't love," she added, half aloud. And walking to the window she said, "Come here, Carol. Isn't there something wonderful about it, even to-day?"

The child came to stand beside her, and they looked out into the old garden that was bowed and beaten by the blowing sheets of the gray rain. The paths ran yellow streams that trickled and wriggled between the bricks; the rosebushes, still wearing bronzed leaves and red haws, stood upon muddy islands between pools of coffee-coloured water. Chrysanthemums lay upon their faces, their slim foliage in the mud, the last yellow leaves were shredded from the writhing willows, and the tall eucalyptus trees shook like shaken towers.

Even the sea, at the foot of the garden, was beaten flat, and the rain smoked like mist all along the head-

lands that stretched below Bowers Hill far to the dim south. Antone, dripping water, pushed his way through the whirlwind at the terrace gate, under the agitated fig tree, and came toward the kitchen door, his egg basket on his arm.

"We'll take Davy after lunch and go down to the barn," Jane said, eyes dancing as she looked at it, "and maybe Carlotta'll come over and watch him, and you and I can walk into Los Antonios and back. Good heavens, how it pours!"

"Thunder!" Carol rejoiced, wide-eyed, even a little awed, as a distant ominous rumble strengthened to crashing and banging, just overhead, and a sickly blue light quivered for a heart-stopping second in the room.

"Thunder at Storm House—I don't think I ever heard it before!" Jane commented, thrilled herself. "Listen—it may have waked him? Too Fah, you go see if Davy asleep," she directed as, in immaculate white, his rag duster in his yellow hand, the young Chinese put his head into the room.

"Oh—bik stom!" stammered Too Fah.

"Big storm—I should think!" Jane agreed. "You go up see baby 'sleep," she repeated.

"Mist' Chick-ring in kitchen—say too much wet," Too Fah informed her.

"Mr. Chickering in kitchen? Oh, it's Uncle Joe, Carol!" Jane exclaimed. "In all this rain!"

She went swiftly out to the big, clean, brightly lighted region that smelled of wholesome baking, over which Hong had for so many years reigned supreme. Shining range, gas stove all white enamel and nickel plate, sink shining white, linoleum floor shining white and blue, curtains checkered blue and white, pantry giving through a half-opened door a hint of endless, inexhaustible jars and boxes, and Sunday's turkey lying stark

and naked upon the centre table, with the big yellow bowl of crumbs ready for his last stuffing. Jane found the kitchen, this morning, the most inviting place in the house.

Joe Chickering was shedding his outer garments on the porch; his kindly face ran rain, his hair was soaked, he abandoned his shoes, and followed Jane to the sitting room in his stocking feet.

"Carol, run upstairs, darling, and get Daddy's big brown wrapper from the spare-room closet," Jane told the child, herself hospitably piling logs on the fire. "Joe, you'll get pneumonia doing this!" she scolded affectionately.

"Oh, it's grand out," said Joe; "it's as warm as toast!"

"I don't see how you could keep your footing. I never saw such a storm. How's your Sheila?"

"My Sheila is entirely adorable," Joe, who had married late and felt himself the discoverer of connubial bliss, answered contentedly.

"Don't forget you're asked to turkey dinner at two o'clock to-morrow."

"We'll be here."

"Davy had a regular meal yesterday," Jane said, her face flushed from the fire as she turned about and rose to her feet. She beat her hands lightly together to dust them. "Potato, sand dab, spinach, rusk, and apple sauce. How's that for eleven months?" boasted his mother.

"I dare say it's phenomenal," Joe conceded meekly. "Sheila says he's simply a prodigy," he added, "and she knows. Bob gets home to-day for Easter holidays, by the way," he added, of a small stepson.

"Holidays! Poor infant," Jane lamented, glancing at the streaming window panes.

"Oh, he won't care," Joe assured her carelessly. "He'd just as soon scramble along the shore in this weather as in any other."

"Jane," asked Carol, who had returned, "may I watch Hong stuff the turkey?"

"Yes, but don't bother him. And don't eat more than one cooky!"

She was helping Joe into the wrapper.

"It would be much more sensible to pass the time of day with you, without letting you in," she said, "and then send you home to get nice and dry, once and for all!"

But her eyes were uneasy, and she showed no surprise when he said awkwardly and hurriedly, "Well, I had a letter from Jerry."

"Yes, I had one, too, yesterday," Jane said quickly. "But it is more than five weeks old. It was written about the first of February; it's postmarked 'Cawnpore.'"

"Mine too; they were probably mailed together," Joe observed; "there's nothing in it, except that he thanks me for doing something—I don't remember what, or how he knew about it."

"Oh, he's gotten some of our letters," Jane stated, paling a little as she took from his hand the thin, foreign-looking envelope, with the multi-coloured stamp.

"You think so?"

"I know it. I wrote the captain of that first ship—the ship that had that frightful crossing, and that was lost for eleven days, the *Drika* something," Jane explained, her eyes following the few typewritten lines of Joe's letter apathetically. She sighed as she refolded it and handed it back. "He knows about Davy," she said.

"What makes you think so, Jane? Has he ever said anything about the baby?"

"No, not directly. He only writes a few words. Yesterday's letter didn't say anything. He said that there had been a little local scrap where he was, and that he had gotten into it. There's no question in my mind," Jane said, fixing her clear eyes on the man, her breast rising in a great sigh, "there's no question in my mind that he is trying—honourably—to get himself killed. Poor Jerry! I know him, Joe, as nobody in the world ever knew him. He thinks that is the only way out."

"You've told him," Joe said huskily, "that you'll forgive him?"

Tears came to her eyes.

"I don't know that I've ever said that in so many words, Joe. My letters are as short as his. And of course he may only have gotten one or two—there haven't been more than four or five in all. No," Jane said slowly, "I never said that I would forgive him, because I don't know just what that means, Joe. If it means go back to the old way—I *couldn't!* No matter how much I wanted to, I couldn't do that. I was a sort of little girl when he went away. Now I've skipped all the years in between and I'm much older. More than that," she added, "I've no particular reason to suppose he wants to come back.

"It was just," she went on musingly, in a silence, "that I thought Jerry was something, Joe. And he wasn't. He wasn't that particular thing.

"But if feeling sorry for him, and if understanding that the terrible experience he had in the war and his shyness and—well, differentness from other people," she began again, after a pause—"if understanding all that would help him, make him happier, then he ought to know that indeed I do. The shock, and his genius,

his sensitiveness to everything that anyone is suffering, his feeling the weight of the world, all that explains it to me. And I think I am sorrier for Jerry than for anyone else I ever knew!"

"You can't use any fast and hard rule with a fellow like that," Joe pleaded. "He—pays us in other ways. You can't judge, with Jerry."

"Indeed you can't, Joe."

"And some day—" Joe cleared his throat—"some day he'll come back, and you'll have to—you'll have to be kind to him, Jane," he faltered.

She looked at him a long time, steadily, the youthful red dying out of her firm cheeks. A cool little air, wet with rain, had crept in through some shutter or jamb and drifted through the warm room. There was no sound.

"Is he at your house, Joe?" Jane asked after a while, simply, her eyes fixed on the man's face.

Joe nodded. And again, for a long time, neither spoke.

Then the man asked timidly, "Will you see him, Jane?"

She gave him an impatient glance, looked into the fire.

"Why, of course, I shall have to see him!" she said, sensibly and quickly.

"He's been very ill," Joe offered uneasily.

"Jerry?" She was silent, frowning faintly. "When did he come, Joe?" she asked.

"This morning."

"But there's no ship in?" Jane questioned.

"She watches the ships, she's been expecting him whether she knew it or not," Joe thought, and took comfort.

"He came down from Vancouver," Joe explained. "He's been in San Francisco for a day or two."

For a few minutes she was silent.

"He can come any time he wants to, of course," she presently said, coldly and indifferently. "Only, if he has been ill, he ought not to come out in this rain."

"He has been *very* ill," Joe said gravely. Jane looked at him with a first faint flash of curiosity.

"How do you mean? His nerves again?"

"No. But he seems—broken. And he has a most horrible chest cold."

She bit her lip, looked down, breathing a little hard, as if she did not know what to say.

"He's done everything he shouldn't have done," Joe pursued. "He's been roaming over the world everywhere, not taking, I imagine, any care of himself. He's what? Not much over forty, and he looks sixty. You'll —you'll feel sorry for him, Jane."

"I'm sorry for him now. I'm sorry for us all," she answered briefly.

Joe was silent for a few minutes, watching her, and after a pause she said, with a little awkwardness and nervousness he had not seen in her for a long time,

"Would you—like me to telephone, Joe?"

"No, no," he answered. "He's—he's out here in my car. I parked down the road, under the trees, there."

"I thought you walked over?"

"No, just from the car. Jerry," Joe warned her, "couldn't possibly walk over."

"Why not?" she demanded, her blue eyes burning dark in a white face.

"He's sick, Jane."

"Go out," she said, her face pale and strained, her eyes stern and resentful. "Go out and get him, Joe, and tell him to come in."

"I wanted the doctor to see him, at our house," Joe said, departing, "but Jerry wouldn't wait!"

"The doctor!"

She stared at him, bewildered. Joe came over and took hold of her arm, shaking it gently.

"I tell you he's *sick*, Jane," he said, going.

Left alone, she stood in the centre of the room for a moment, her hands pressed to her temples. Then wildly, swiftly, she moved about, putting wood on the fire, drawing Jerry's old leather armchair beside it, telephoning to the doctor.

She went to the bright kitchen; it all looked strange. Hong, white-clad and busy, the big velvet black cat on the window sill, Carol hanging entranced beside the turkey and the yellow bowl.

"Carol, somebody's coming home this morning."

Her voice told the story; Carol looked up, paling, flushing.

"Not——" The child swallowed. "Not Daddy!"

"I think so."

"Oh, Jane!" Carol screamed, rushing to her.

Jane smiled a lifeless explanation to the Chinese.

"Boss come back."

"Oo-oo, boss come back, hey?" Hong echoed, pleased and surprised. His shrewd little eyes read her face.

"Yes. Come back now."

"Too muchy all time go 'way, hey?" Hong chuckled complacently. "Bik dinner, hey?"

"No, not big dinner. Boss plenty sick," Jane explained.

"Sick!" Carol exclaimed anxiously.

"Uncle Joe says not well. You must come in and kiss him quietly, Carol, and then run off again, and let me talk to him. And after that get Davy and bring him down."

"But not wake him," Carol supplied conscientiously.

"Yes, I think I would wake him. We'll see," Jane,

who looked very tired, said nervously; "we'll see how Daddy feels."

"Jane, but aren't you *happy!*"

"Yes. I—I'm glad, of course." Her voice shook a little.

"Boss come," Too Fah announced, appearing in the pantry door.

"Boss come! All right. Come with me, Carol," Jane said, catching the child's hand tightly.

There was a smell of spice cake and cooling prunes in the pantry; the passage smelled of damp and wood smoke. Jane noticed again that the white china door-knob was loose; she must tell Fah—she must tell Antone. . . .

CHAPTER XXIII

THEY reached the sitting-room doorway, and she saw two men standing by the fireplace in the lamplight inside. The rain was still hammering down, gray and steady on the garden, the wind was rattling bare bushes and ruffling the coffee-brown puddles.

Both men were spattered with rain; good rosy Joe Chickering, with his collar turned up, and a tall, thin, bowed man in a belted, shabby raincoat. He turned about, this taller man, as she and Carol came in.

"Jane!" he said, in a hoarse voice she would never have known. Carol with a scream rushed forward, and was laughing and crying in her father's arms. The child's face was wet, but over her head Jerome Delafield continued to regard Jane with dry, fevered eyes.

"You're wet, Jerry. Take that coat off," Jane said, her face entirely colourless, her blue eyes strained, but her manner as usual boyish, undramatic, simple. "Sit down," she directed, flinging the coat on a chair, "and, Carol, you go upstairs to the closet in the spare room, the room that used to be Daddy's and mine, and get his old slippers, the old brown ones, or the furry white ones, and get his blue silk wrapper, the Chinese one."

Her hand, warm, brown, vital, touched his wrist; her eyes were alarmed.

"You have a fever, Jerry."

"I don't think so."

The hoarse strained voice sounded strangely in the

lamplit, comfortable room, with its blazing fire and aligned books, its familiar old chairs and magazine-littered table.

"Take away these wet things, Fah. You're shivering," Jane said. "I've telephoned for the doctor."

She stood with her back to the fire, a youthful figure in a striped blue cotton gown, with her dark hair in a cloud about her head. Jerome, looking at her with sick and dizzied eyes, noted the remembered soft fuzzy bloom on her upper lip and on the outlines of her rounded cheek.

"I didn't mean to do this," he apologized, his teeth chattering.

Jane took something from Hong, who came in, scared and sympathetic, a steaming cup.

"Hello, Hong," Jerome muttered, looking up with burning eyes, managing a twisted smile.

"Hello, Boss. Sik, huh?" Hong asked, beaming.

"Drink it," Jane said.

"I—truly I can't, dear."

The little affectionate word slipped out inadvertently. It made her white cheek flush; she put the cup on the mantel, and stood there looking down at Jerome with distressed and puzzled eyes. Joe Chickering had disappeared . .

"How long have you had this cold?"

"I don't know, Jane," he whispered, coughing. "It seemed to me—in Vancouver—that I was all right, except that I was terribly tired. But yesterday in San Francisco——" He tossed his head restlessly, and something about the forlorn tumble of the lanky fair hair that was so heavily streaked with gray touched her heart. "Yesterday in San Francisco I had the—the damnedest headache," he went on fretfully. "I lay down for a while, and I took some stuff that the

hotel doctor gave me—and then this shivering and burning up began.

"I didn't come down here to be sick," he assured her, with the first flash she had seen of his old smile.

Jerry's old smile. The kindly, gray-eyed, understanding smile that had smoothed her way for so many wonderful years. Through it she saw, for the first time to-day, the old Jerry, the lean, fine, eagerly intelligent, tenderly appreciative man who had made Storm House, for her, the one place in the world that was home.

"But I had to come down here," he went on, as if continuing his speech uninterruptedly, "to tell you —something."

Bowed, trembling, his soaked and crushed collar showing above the folds of the blue wrapper, his big hands shaking as he ground them together, and his so much older face, haggard and pitiful under the disordered wet locks of his grayed hair, he leaned forward in his own old chair and faced her.

"First, after the war," his hoarse, appealing voice said simply, "I was afraid of living at all, Jane.

"Elsie cured me of that. And then, after she died, I was afraid again. Afraid of facing life and people and noises, with Carol to care for—and my new book contracted for, and all kinds of bothers hammering in the back of my mind. Then you came."

He was silent, and the rain shook the windows, and the electric current flickered in the lamp and steadied. Outside the world was gray, beaten, and filled with wild creaking, splashing, and dripping. But here, in the old sitting room, there was peace.

"Sylvia," Jerome began, after a silence, "Sylvia made me feel that I was missing everything. That I had shut myself into a groove—afraid to enjoy life, to meet men, to love women."

He was silent again. Jane glanced anxiously at the windows, at the door. If the doctor would but come!

"I thought perhaps I was a fool to be so afraid," he said. "I followed her to that place of noises and crowds—money—people spending money. Jamming into the subways, with their breaths all mingling together—little girls like Carol. Poor little fellows—clerks, you know. Turning the papers over and over—turning them in other people's faces—to find the funny strips," he said, wheezing.

"Don't talk, Jerry!"

"I have to. Cheap food," he muttered, passing his hot hand across his hot forehead, "cheap clothes and shoes and movies and houses—miles of cheap little rooms with cheap papers on their walls. After that," he finished, looking at her with blazing, half-sane eyes, "I wasn't afraid of anything! I'd killed—everything," he said, clawing at his breast blindly, "everything in here! I'd killed—you."

She was staring at him, her blue eyes flaming like sapphires.

"So you shipped on the *Drika?*" she said, after a while.

"I shipped on the *Drika Klingsberg*. She didn't look as if she could make any harbour, but I've been on worse boats since. And never afraid of life again, Jane. That was burned out of me. But something else was there all the time, and this ends it," he said; "after this I'll go away again. All the time, I hadn't really killed fear. I was afraid, Jane, more than ever before. I was afraid to come back here, and have this talk with you. It's been riding me—riding me—on all the seas, by all the rivers, what I did to you, and that I would have to come back just for this hour."

"You didn't have to!" she said bluntly, almost

coldly. His face, that had been burning scarlet, was suddenly drained of blood. He leaned back, so spent and white that Jane thought he might be dying. Her heart rose on a great plunge of fear.

"I have to have you—say just once,' 'he said hoarsely, "that you don't think unkindly of me—that you have forgiven me."

These were the phrases, these were the very words of which she had dreamed for more than a year. He was really back here, Jerry, sitting in his old red-leather chair, himself, not the dream of him.

But it all seemed different, somehow. It seemed odd and flat and lifeless. It was strange, to begin with, to have the day so dark and dreary, with the gray sea running high, and the wind blowing, and the wet trees doubling over themselves, and the chrysanthemums on their faces. It seemed all wrong to have the house draughty in the halls and scented with baking and wood smoke, and to have the lights lighted, while the clocks stood at half-past twelve, noon. She had always dreamed that Jerry would come home some hot, green, trembling sweet summer day, when they were all on the terrace, Carol in one of her briefest frocks, with her head bare, Davy all yellow curls and rosy cheeks.

"I think," she said, in a childish swift awkward rush, "I think what—what made me sorry—was that you should miss so much—fun. Or that—that it wasn't fun, to you, as it was to me—that it didn't matter to you. That's what's been giving me such a heartache, not to be able to reach you, even when Carol was in the school play, even when Davy came."

He was looking at her strangely.

"You minded that?" he asked.

"Yes, because there was so much *happiness* in it, Jerry," she said timidly.

"But I want you to say you forgive me," he persisted in a strained tone.

"I do," she answered quickly, uncomfortably.

"You've not had hard thoughts of me, Jane?"

She was embarrassed.

"Oh, no, or I haven't now. Oh, no, Jerry!" she stammered, with a nervous little flicker of laughter. "It wasn't—a thing to have hard thoughts about," she added, sobering again. "It was just—what you wanted to do." And she spread her hands, with an eloquent gesture. "I've been unhappy," Jane confessed simply. "But never mad," she ended.

"You were alone when the boy came?" he said steadily, not looking at her now, his face dropped, and his long, nervous fingers held tightly over his eyes.

"Yes, but I wasn't very sick. I had a grand time!" Jane assured him. "It was all a rush and a tumble, and the only trouble was having it David instead of Sarah. But he's so wonderful that from the beginning I didn't mind that," she said. And then, as an afterthought, "My father's name was David Cassell."

"What a fool I am!" Jerome said, after a long silence.

The woman said nothing. But she continued to watch him anxiously, and to glance sometimes toward the window or the door. The rain fell unceasingly; there was another rumble of thunder, and the wind howled about the house.

Carol put her head in the door, beaming, the curly-headed blond baby, aggrieved and rosy from sleep, against her shoulder. Jane ran to the door; Jerome saw her so, a minute, with her child in her sturdy little arms; there was a bloom on the baby's face, the same bloom he had always seen on her own.

Then she was gone, and strange dreams and shadows began to meet and mingle in the room: dreams of Elsie—

the old-maid friend of his mother, to whom he had paid a casual visit years ago; dreams of his own first emotions of gratitude toward her, and toward the old house, and the sea, and the terrace with its shade of pepper and fig trees; memories of the odd marriage, of his amaze when he discovered that there was to be a child of that union, and of little Carol, a frail miracle of babyhood, sitting in his lap, down on the plateau, with a tiny hand locked tightly about each of his big thumbs.

He remembered the succession of governesses for Carol—and the last one, the sturdy, youthful Miss Cassell, whom he had supposed upon first sight to be an actual child. Past twenty, but she had looked to be about fifteen. And he remembered Elsie's death and the exquisite years that had followed, when his healed heart and soul had bathed in the homely, exquisite peace of Storm House as the heart and soul of a happy child. Jane—these memories meant only Jane, jealous, eager, loving, childish, and yet so surprisingly wise.

After that it was all fever, rush and hurry; half-considered actions tumbling upon the heels of half-assimilated thoughts. Soot again, noise again, crowds and cities again, poverty, need, cold and hunger again, voices, lies, a wild jumble of heat and jarring sounds, the grinding of brakes, the shrilling of whistles, the shuffle of hundreds—millions—of hopeless feet.

The sitting room was warm, and his head was aching furiously again; the pain was sickening, nauseating, it made him feel weak and dizzy. He thought he would get up—he could not be ill, here in Jane's house—there was a hospital in Santa Lolita.

"Joe, I'm pretty sick," he said to Joe, on whose arm he was leaning. "Will you get me to your house, old boy? I can't—put this—up to her."

"We're taking care of you," Joe said. Dr. Graham was there too; they were on the old stairs.

"Here—I don't want to go upstairs."

Everything swooped and swerved about him. They were passing an open door; there was a brightly lighted nursery inside, white walls, dancing fire in a white fireplace, a blue rug with blocks and toy animals scattered on it. A little white boy with yellow hair on the rug, a bigger girl with him. The girl jumped up to shut the door, and Jerome caught a glimpse of her sorry childish eyes—his daughter's eyes.

"Jane—I can't put this up to you." But this was not Jane; this was a trained nurse. He knew their clever, firm, practised hands. The stiff linen of her apron crinkled as she stooped to lower him into bed.

Miss Perry. And Miss Lacey. Miss Perry stout and spectacled and middle-aged, and Miss Lacey thin, red-headed, and Irish, with big brown freckles on a white skin.

They opened the windows wide, and the cold wet air rushed in, and the nurses wore their heavy sweaters. He lapsed into tortured slumber, awakened with a rocking head, his dry mouth split like the floor of the desert into burning sections. He whispered, and knew that the words were all wrong, that they meant nothing, and so fell into shallow, burning, troubled sleep again.

They had pinned a cone of newspaper about the lamp. It was night, his head was aching. The rain had ceased; the world was unnaturally still, not a sound anywhere—even the gutters had stopped dripping.

Never a child's voice in the house, nor a door slamming. Silence. Headache. Silence. Headache. Stout, kind Miss Perry in her place, and then noiselessly, mysteriously, thin, kind Miss Lacey there instead.

"Dry," he whispered, of his split mouth.

"You poor thing!"

And to somebody else he more than once heard Miss Lacey or Miss Perry add, "He doesn't know it. He's not really conscious."

"He's suffering!" It was the boyish, rich, remembered little voice, Jane's voice, protestant now with pain.

"He isn't really suffering, Mrs. Delafield, he doesn't know anything."

This was confusing again. Mrs. Delafield. But where was Jane?

Now and then he saw her: small dark head a mop of black, eyes blue and anxious and yet smiling. She was smiling as if she didn't want him to be frightened. Smiling reassuringly. Sometimes when he stirred his fingers he felt other fingers, warm and strong and small, holding them, and knew that that was Jane.

But for the pain, the dryness, heaviness, and dizziness he would have thanked her, and apologized for all this. Nurses—silence—the doctor constantly.

It was too much effort. He abandoned the heavy, hazy idea. The dark wheel of the days and the nights began again. Strange shadows and phantoms circled about him, and mingled with the quiet reflection of the lamp on the wall, and the faces and gowns of the nurses. The windows were always wide open, the cool air pouring through, the women in their sweaters, and yet he could not breathe.

The hour came when his head was cool and he felt no pain, felt only strangely light and infinitely rested. He came into this space of exquisite normality and relaxation unexpectedly; he had been sleeping, now he was awake. The doctor was there, both nurses. And as he languidly swept his eyes about the room Jane came

in, Carol beside her, and the baby he did not know in her arms.

They stood there for a moment, looking at him, and he heard Jane say, "Kiss him, darling," and, shutting his tired eyes, he felt Carol's warm, soft little mouth brush against his cold forehead.

Then it was night again, and he saw the square of rich blackness that was the window, and felt the cool rush of the air. The nurses were talking, and he heard them say that the doctor was downstairs, that he would "stay, now." They said she was wonderful, she had not broken at all. Who? he thought.

He looked up and saw Joe, with his face all blotched and wet, and his eyes soaked and swollen with tears, and smiled at him. But Joe did not speak, or come near to the bed, and when Jerome, who had wearily closed his eyes, opened them, Joe was gone.

"London?" he whispered to the nurse, the big nurse.

"All safe," she said, smiling. But her eyes were wet, too.

"What was the matter? Was it a boiler plate?" Jerome asked. "Was it as hot as this," he said, troubled and frightened, "when we were in Sydney before?"

He felt he was talking crazily, he could not stop. A sudden fear shook him.

"Is that man here?" he asked, starting up.

"No one is here," the nurse said.

"I live at a place called Storm House," Jerome told her. "It is heaven there—in the summer—on the terrace. We are only a hundred feet from the sea."

His eyes widened painfully.

"Am I there now?" he asked, in a panic.

"Right there, Mr. Delafield."

"But where is my wife? Where is Jane?" he asked. "Is she dead? Is that what is making us all so queer?"

In a dream he saw the nurse's face, looking kindly down, infinite pity upon her comfortable, commonplace features.

"Shall I call her?" she said.

She was gone. When he looked again there were several persons in a group over by the door: the doctor, and the big nurse, and Joe Chickering. Jane was with them, too, his companionable, sturdy, loving little Jane. He saw the strange shadowy pallor about her blue eyes as she came toward him, he saw the soft bloom on the thinned line of her rosy, boyish face.

She knelt down beside him and took both his hands, and when he smiled at her he felt the painful, exquisite tears prick through his lids and a sense of infinite peace —of ineffable well-being possess him, and he clung to her like a child.

"You forgive me, Jenny?"

She smiled gallantly. But the brave little mouth quivered, and the throat was convulsed. Mist instantly shone on her blinking lashes. She did not speak.

"I'm so—gloriously happy!" he whispered. He shut his eyes.

"Jerry," Jane said suddenly, in a clear, quiet voice. It was the voice of the wife who puts her head in at a study door on a busy morning. It had regretful apology in it. It pierced his sinking and swooning senses, and in an agony of weakness he opened his heavy eyes and looked expectantly at her.

She had his languid hand between both her warm brown ones, her elbows were resting on the bed, her face was close to his own.

"Jerry, you—you mustn't go," she stammered.

His confused brain tried to gather itself into concentration, into comprehension.

"We've done all we can, dear," Jane said on a quick, fluttering breath. "Now you've got to help!"

His gray eyes, sunken in an ivory face, were fixed on hers with a child's pathetic, helpless faith.

"For my sake," Jane began. Her lip trembled, her voice broke with tears. "For my sake, live, Jerry!" she faltered.

He did not see the dim room beyond her and the transfixed group at the door; he saw only her dear and familiar face, with the faint fuzz on temples and cheekbones showing against the light and the blue eyes burning with love and despair.

"Why, Jenny," his thick lips whispered with difficulty. He tried to smile. His feeble hand was raised, and he laid it on the dark head she suddenly laid against his cheek.

"Jenny?" he questioned again, bewilderedly.

"You mustn't go," Jane said firmly.

"Mustn't," Jerry breathed. She had raised her head, she was looking at him again, her eyes very close.

"No, you mustn't," she persisted, tears coming again into her eyes.

Jerry moved his weary gaze to Joe Chickering's face, above Jane's.

"Look at me," Jane directed him. "I need you, Jerry. I want you to get well—you've got to get well."

For a long minute Jerry looked into her eyes.

"Live," she said.

There was absolute silence in the room; the doctor did not move a muscle, neither nurse stirred. Joe remained fixed, behind Jane, and Jane held her husband's limp hand in both hers and looked straight into his face, uncompromising, commanding.

"You must live, Jerry," she said again, firmly and loudly.

"All right, Jenny," the sick man said after a pause, simply, in a thread of a voice. His lids lowered.

Suddenly Jane seemed to weaken. She looked over her shoulder at the doctor.

"May I stay here?"

"Oh, yes, stay!" Jerry said in alarm, opening his eyes.

"You must go right to sleep if I stay, Jerry."

"All right. I will." He turned his weak head feebly, obediently, on the pillow; she straightened it a little, very gently, with trembling hands.

"He's going to sleep," she breathed to the others, with a nod.

"Don't go, Jenny."

"No, I'm not going, darling. I'm right here. But you're going to sleep, you know."

"Pulse?" Miss Perry whispered through tears to the doctor. But the doctor, his own face wet, shook his head.

"Sometimes there's a minute of choice between life and death," the doctor told the nurse a few days later, "and that was it—and Delafield chose life!"

At the time he merely said to Jane, "Don't leave him. If he could really get some natural sleep——"

She did not speak. Her blue eyes sent into his a look of love and faith, and half turning on the little hassock Miss Perry put beneath her on the floor, she laid her sunburned, boyish young cheek against the thin hand she held clasped in both her own, and rested her small body against the bed.

An hour later doctor and nurse, peeping into the room, saw that the patient was healthily asleep, and caught the flash of the blue eyes watching—hoping—

fearing—at his side. And again, an hour later, they looked in.

Jerome was still sleeping, his hand captured fast between Jane's two small brown ones. And now Jane was asleep, too, with an expression of utter happiness upon her unconscious, proud, triumphant little face.

THE END

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